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DISSONANCE

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Lilith

vol. 40, no. 3 • fall 2015

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth." (Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b)

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"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."
— Nessa Rapoport

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ILLUSTRATION: NICOLE HOLLANDER

Number One on the New York Times nonfiction best-seller list is *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, by Marie Kondo (not Jewish, in case you were wondering). You've read the book? Me too. It changed, maybe forever, the way I fold my underwear and line up my t-shirts. The book's guiding injunction (Japanese folding tricks aside) is Discard. And while I love the idea of simplifying my closets—though not so much my bookshelves, thank you—I believe that in Kondo's approach lurks some potential danger. It's one thing to thank objects for their service to you before you find them a new home, as she suggests. But discarding can delete history that cannot easily be recaptured.

Let's start with domestic stuff we no longer use. For instance, your family-heirloom meat grinder with all its parts, the silk trousseau lingerie that dates back 90 years, that long dress with Arab embroidery from the *shuk* in Jerusalem, circa 1970. (Um… these are all hypotheticals, of course.) If one were to simply cast off these things, stories about the ways women lived and worked would vanish too. Look, and you'll notice objects that get discarded are often those connected to women's lives. Items for cooking and sewing, handicrafts, clothing. All part of what's designated as material culture. As you know, the really important stuff—business transactions, legal documents, the backbone of the lives of many *men* through the ages (hold off on the class analysis for a minute)—gets saved routinely. And so we've lost a big chunk of women's history. Even feminism's rise over the past half century has been imperfectly documented.

Lilith, largely intentionally, has kept from history's dustbin a significant collection of epehmera like 'zines and early feminist hagadas, invitations to sisterhood programs and protest marches, fan mail and notes from editorial meetings. Why?

Historian Joyce Antler, whose work, like Lilith's, focuses on the intersection of the women's movement and Jewish identity, describes Lilith as "an important place to go if you want to know anything about the story of how Jewish women have participated in the world since 1976. It provides a marvelous window to the Jewish community…. It's an archival gold mine."

Lilith, largely intentionally, has kept from history's dustbin a significant collection of epehmera like 'zines and early feminist hagadas, invitations to sisterhood programs and protest marches, fan mail and notes from editorial meetings. All in the service of Lilith's mission to drive gender justice, inclusivity and women's rights in Judaism, while speaking with a Jewish voice on a whole range of women's issues.

But lest you (or Marie Kondo) fear that we're choking on the dust of the ages in Lilith's office, I come bearing good news. Our collection of paper files, objects, photos, recordings and more has been acquired by the special collections library at Brandeis University, my alma mater, thanks to the generosity of Elaine Reuben, a Lilith supporter who is also a Brandeis alumna.

The Lilith collection will be available to scholars, and the university anticipates (as we do, too) that these files will be a real treasure for people interested in tracking the history of feminism in Jewish life, the vagaries of nonprofit journalism in print and online, the development of iconic stories appearing in Lilith, and more.

(Speaking of those stories…here's a reminder: every back issue of the magazine is available free to Lilith subscribers in the online archive at Lilith.org.)

Lilith has pioneered writing on a range of once-taboo and now still controversial subjects: family violence, rabbinic sexual misconduct, the shifting timeline of women's reproductive choices, among others. Like you, Lilith's writers look for nuance and want to know the complex backstories. The "Jewish cognitive dissonance" narratives in this issue are revealing examples. Lilith not only reports the facts, but intentionally sees their complexity, interprets them and illuminates new paths to empathy and action, and the Lilith papers show the evolution and shaping of the content you read in every issue.

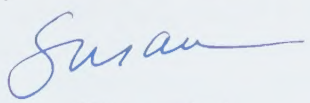
Which may explain why I've had mixed feelings about that book on tidying.

In our tidy email culture we no longer have generations of letters between authors and editors, changes and refinements which were parsed with vigor and sometimes even recorded on vellum stationery. Now it's the final version of an emailed, track-changed manuscript that survives. But it's terrific fun to see what came before the finished product.

Each of the 800+ files in the Lilith collection is part of this narrative. How *did* Lilith's hair issue come to be? And what was the fallout from our reporting on bad behavior by rabbis? What about the particularly Jewish take on abortion rights and new reproductive technologies? And edgy subjects, like the special challenges facing deaf Jewish women, new rituals for gender transition, mothers who relinquished their children for adoption, the political power Jewish women wield with our philanthropy.

Here's why the university wanted this collection: "With an editorial staff that established from the outset its willingness to take risks, the magazine has continuously addressed controversy directly, celebrating and critiquing how Jews live now. The archive constructs a powerful narrative around the genesis and development of Lilith as a Jewish feminist publication, as well as the magazine's ongoing role in exploring Jewish identity, including and documenting the experiences of Jewish women and amplifying voices rarely heard."

The issue you're reading today is part of the continuing story. Don't throw it out when you're done! Thank it for its service to you and pass it along to the next reader. Please.



Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: DAVID GREENSPUN

ISRAELI CINEMA

Women Inventing Themselves

The film "Self Made" ("Boreg" in Hebrew, meaning "hardware screw"), written and directed by **Shira Geffen**, opens with the collapse of a couple's bed, out of which falls Michal Kayam (played by **Sarah Adler**), an artist, hitting her head.

After her husband leaves on a business trip, she orders a new bed. But going about assembling it, finds she is missing a screw. Then, in this palindrome-like film, we meet Nadine Nasrallah (played by **Samira Saraya**), who travels though checkpoints from the Occupied Territories to get to her job at Eteka, an Ikea-like factory where she pilfers screws from the packets she puts together; she has a terrible sense of direction and drops the screws, Hansel-and-Gretel-like, along her way to work in order to find her way back home.

Both female characters have memory issues, and when in the course of several absurd events they change places, the irony is not lost on the viewer that no one really pays enough attention to them to notice the switch, including a German TV crew who come to interview the artist. This film in its quiet way has much to say about the "situation" in Israel and its repercussions on everyone's lives, but also, in particular, about the lives of women. At a screening of this sometimes slow, often funny and ultimately sobering feature film at the JCC Manhattan in June, Geffen told the audience she identifies with both women in the film; that we should notice there was no violence or nudity in it; that she spent several months a few years ago with Machsom Watch, the Israeli group that monitors checkpoints. The seed for the plot was a newspaper article about a Palestinian woman who came to detonate a bomb in an Israeli shopping mall but changed her mind when she got there because she realized she, like the other strollers, wanted to shop and have an ice cream.

Among the many details to notice in this beautifully made film is that both female protagonists have first and last names, making them seem specific and real, rather than creatures of myth.

NAOMI DANIS

VOICES ILLUSTRATION BY LIANA FINCK
PHOTO: WEST END FILMS

FROM THE LILITH BLOG

A 20-Year-Old's Queer Jewish Feminist Take on the SCOTUS Ruling

It was a slow Friday morning at the front desk of the museum where I work, so I was browsing the news.

That's when I saw it. The 5–4 Supreme Court decision recognizing marriage equality across the nation. I was flooded with unexpected emotion—and taken aback by an unfamiliar sense of American pride. Could it really be true? As a gay person, was I no longer a second-class citizen?

...I was raised by secular Jewish parents who left the anti-Semitic former Soviet Union, a place which today, as the Russian Federation, continues to discriminate against minorities, still including Jews, but now especially queer-identified people. Extreme violence toward queer people in Russia seems to be the cultural norm. I've never visited where my parents grew up, and can't say a trip is in the works—at least in the near future, because of the realities of Putin's Russia.

And in that sense, I am happy to live in America. Happy to be privileged, happy that I can one day marry and have that union recognized. So as a white, cisgender gay American—(the fight does not end at marriage equality! We need to advocate now, harder than ever, for our trans family, especially trans people of color, who are being killed at alarmingly high rates)—I have been upgraded to the status of first-class citizen.

In the secular world.

Although I identify as mostly secular, my Jewishness is not entirely relegated to my ethnicity. As I enter the beautiful Orthodox synagogue the museum is housed in, and give historical tours to the public—I can't help but feel an overwhelming sense of nostalgia, spirituality, and lamentation. I mourn that I cannot one day marry in this space that means so much to me, a space that reinvigorates my sense of Jewish identity, a space that still upholds Orthodox tradition. A space that will not perform gay marriages.

ANNA SHNEYDERMAN

COMING OUT AS HAIRLESS BEAUTIES

Here at our table for four, where we find ourselves referring to the rest of the world as "haired," we superhuman alopecians discuss all that we have in common. The ability to shower in 30 seconds. Irritation at the way sweat drips off a hairless scalp when doing downward dog. Exasperation at the all-too-familiar lascivious inquiry, "You mean you don't have hair *anywhere*?"

And a deep appreciation for living in New York City, where a bald woman is rarely the oddest thing anyone has seen on a given day.

...Despite our inner evolutions toward the decision not to cover our heads, we still live in a hair-normative culture, with hair directly connected to femininity. A bald woman threatens the typical norms of beauty.

From **Helen Phillips**, "Four Women Bond Over the Beauty in Their Baldness," New York Times, July 30, 2015.

REMEMBERING FOLK SINGER AND SOCIAL-CHANGE AGENT RONNIE GILBERT (1926-2015)

"We sang songs of hope in that strange time after World War II, when already the world was preparing for Cold War," Ms. Gilbert recalled in "The Weavers: Wasn't That a Time," a 1982 documentary about the group. "We still had the feeling that if we could sing loud enough and strong enough and hopefully enough, it would make a difference."

Watch for her memoir, *Ronnie Gilbert: A Radical Life in Song*, scheduled for publication this fall.

RONNIE GILBERT PHOTO BY ROBERT B. LIVINGSTON

FROM THE LILITH BLOG

The Talmud & "Female Viagra"

There are passages from the Talmud which are incredibly sex positive. And while admittedly there are some which are less so, I like to focus on those which support sexual activity within a marriage as a critical component of a healthy relationship. In a passage in *Ketubot*, the tractate which deals with issues pertaining to marriage, it is clear that the rabbis would not, or could not, conceive of a sexless marriage, to the extent that if a vow to abstain from sex lasted more than a week or two, the partners needed to either absolve the vow or divorce. What I'd like to think is that those passages support the idea that sex is not just about what happens in the bedroom between two people, but rather it is a powerful glue that, in the best of circumstances, shapes the relationship, adding an element of intimacy, shared secrets, fun and enjoyment.

And ultimately, if you can ignore the recent rather vituperative discourse on the development of a drug to boost sexual desire in women, that should be the focus of our discussion.

Flibanserin, or Addyi, the first female sexual dysfunction drug to be approved by the FDA, shouldn't be compared to Viagra (although it constantly is), because it doesn't work anything like Viagra. Viagra brings blood to the genitals. Flibanserin works in the neurotransmitters of the brain. If successful it will raise Dopamine levels, or allow pleasurable impulses to transmit more easily in the brain. Drug trials have shown those women who take the drug are more receptive to sexual stimulation and have more satisfying sexual activities. I like to think of it as helping you feel your sexual hunger.

A woman for whom sex has become a chore, something she neither looks forward to, nor thinks about during her daily life, may go along with her partner and have sex because she thinks she should, but doing so is neither very appealing nor very satisfying. And while what happens in the bedroom may be passable, the effects of her disinterest begin to be felt outside the bedroom. The playfulness may be gone. The kiss goodbye in the morning may become rote. The feeling of "you and me together in this" may start to erode. In the end, the feeling of being wanted by your partner is what is so very powerful and necessary in a sexual relationship. When the "wanting" is gone, sex can never be the same.

So a drug that can help a woman "want" as she navigates the complexity of her life, a drug that supports her effort to find the enjoyment in sex again is not a small thing. It's a big thing. Because the Talmud may have had this right, it's not just about what happens in the bedroom. Sex is about the entire relationship.

BAT SHEVA MARCUS

"Take the Disney movie. For a long time, we've been having the conversation about how princess movies are bad for girls. But what are they telling men? The men swoop in and interrupt the woman's story. And then we're surprised when men interrupt women in boardrooms."

From **Cliff Leek**, a graduate student at the Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities at Stony Brook University, quoted by Jessica Bennett, in "A Master's Degree in...Masculinity?" New York Times, August 8, 2015.

GIRLS IN TROUBLE

It's a bumper season for musician and lyricist Alicia Jo Rabins. *Divinity School*, a book of her poetry, was just published, and she has just released a new CD, part of her song cycle "Girls in Trouble," "about the complicated lives of biblical women" rendered in their own blunt words.

The song in the voice of Noah's wife, "Measuring Tape," ends like this:

Just like you said, we came to rest
But what about the others, the ones who failed the test

So you were right, so we survived
But when I looked into your eyes
I saw the ones we left behind

And all I wanted was to understand
How you grew into this other man
Who built a giant boat in our backyard

MIKVEH

Challenging Sexist Conversion Practices

Even before Jews around the world began reeling from the scandalous case of **Barry Freundel**, an Orthodox rabbi in Washington D.C. who secretly and frequently videotaped women immersing naked in the mikveh next to his synagogue, a bold Orthodox independent filmmaker, **Nurit Jacobs-Yinon**, was exposing another case of abuse of rabbinic power and the mikveh in Israel. Five years ago, she was stunned to see an ad seeking religious men to serve on a Beit Din, the court of three required to certify women's conversions at the mikveh. An Israeli feminist, Jacobs-Yinon knew little about what women faced as they went through conversion's final step of ritual immersion. But with Israeli law making it impossible for immigrants, like those from the former Soviet Union,to marry unless they could prove Jewish descent on their mother's side or undergo conversion, she realized the significance of this issue even for secular Israelis. An estimated 75 percent of converts are female, and typically those certifying their mikveh immersion are male.

What Jacobs-Yinon discovered—the violation of female converts' dignity and modesty as the women, shielded only by a robe, held up by the female mikveh attendant, immersed before the men—shocked and angered her. It led her to create the film "A Tale of a Woman and a Robe: Ritual Immersion of Female Converts" and to invitations to testify in the Knesset.

"A Tale of a Woman and a Robe" began as a video installation, part of a 2013 exhibition at Tel Aviv's Artist's House. It was followed by the publication of an illustrated catalog in Hebrew and English in which scholars **Rabbanit Dr. Michal Tikochinsky** and MK Dr. **Aliza Lavie** cite midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* (VaYeshev 84:4)—"Abraham would convert the men, and Sarah, the women"—proving that, in the past, men of the court had delegated women to certify that a convert immersed as a gentile and emerged as a Jew. In the film we meet three male rabbis who concede, with varying degrees of empathy, that the current practice humiliates the women who are converting—but, shrugging, they claim they cannot change the system.

We also meet a convert whose eyes brim with tears as she remembers. Because Jewish law requires the mikveh waters to touch every part of the woman's body, converts immerse before the female mikveh attendant completely naked. Then they put on a robe. But, in this instance, the men entered the mikveh before the woman had donned her robe, and they just stared.

In June, Jacobs-Yinon, one of a growing coterie of Israeli Orthodox female filmmakers, presented her film at the JCC Manhattan and in a private screening in Washington. She challenges us to raise our voices and demand that Israel's chief rabbinate rule that only women certify the ritual immersion of women.

To preview "A Woman and a Robe," visit *www.movie-discovery.com*.

For information about Nurit Jacobs-Yinon's other films, visit *www.aluma-films.com*.

PAMELA S. NADELL

5631
בכאב רב אנו מתאבלים על מותו של
עלי סעד דוואבשה
תינוק תם בן שנה וחצי
שנרצח בידי בנים מבנינו בפשע שנאה מזעזע.
אנו מתאבלים על מדיניות הכיבוש המלבה אלימות וגזענות,
על היותנו בני חברה המקדשת אדמה על פני חיי בני אדם.
חברה שבה כולנו בעל כורחנו שותפים לפשע.
"Jerusalem has grievously sinned and so has become unclean" - Lamentations 1:8
With great pain, we mourn the murder of
ALI SAAD DAWABSHE
An innocent child, one and a half years old
burned by our own sons in an act of flagrant hatred.
We mourn the policies of occupation,
which incite violence and racism,
and our belonging to a society that values land over people,
a society that implicates all of us in this crime.

In Israel—and especially in Jerusalem, where I am living—grief is a public affair. Call me morbid, but it's one of my favorite things about this place.

Posted on walls and in shop windows, sometimes layered dozens deep, stark, black-on-white mourning notices announce recent deaths and, sometimes, where the family will be observing the traditional Jewish mourning period. Imported from the Eastern European broadside tradition, each of these posters is a little island of sadness in a sea of noise.

...So amid the horrific murders in recent weeks of two children—one Palestinian, one Jewish—my friend Romy Achituv, an artist and native Jerusalemite, and I designed mourning notices in Hebrew and in English, the two languages most spoken by Jews here, for Ali Saad Dawabshe, 18 months old, and Shira Banki, 16....

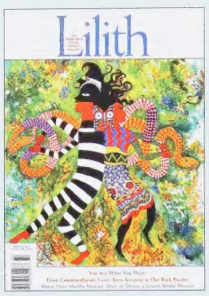
From the beginning, we saw this project more as social engagement than as art, but the range of emotions it has sparked in people we spoke to and heard from, from rage to gratitude, certainly has something in common with art. If there's one positive takeaway from this period of nightmarish violence, it's that small, individual actions might actually make a difference in how people see the world. And that perhaps grief and even outrage have a role in healing the fissures.

From **Ilana Sichel**, "In Praise of Public Grief," ModernLoss.com, August 16, 2015.

TOP PHOTO FROM "A WOMAN AND A ROBE."

Remembering Miriam Schapiro (1923–2015)

Pioneering feminist artist **Miriam Schapiro** died in June, age 91. Her work appeared on the cover of Lilith's Summer 1997 issue and elsewhere in the magazine.



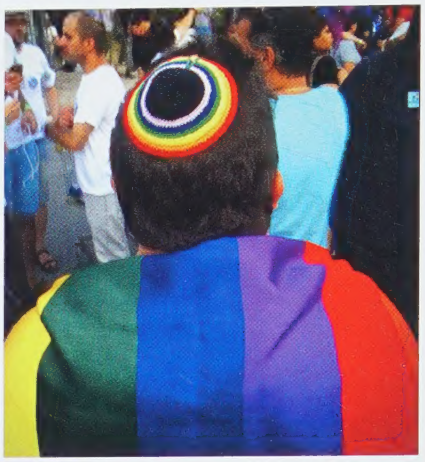
With **Judy Chicago**, Miriam Schapiro founded the Feminist Arts Program at CalArts in 1971. There they created the iconic installation "Womanhouse," described in the artist's artnet.com obituary as "an art installation project where Chicago, Schapiro, and students such as **Mira Schor** and **Faith Wilding**, among others, transformed an abandoned 17-room house into a feminist art environment, complete with Chicago's pristine white 'menstruation bathroom,' with double-wrapped feminine hygiene products on display."

Her collages using elements of traditional women's textile arts—lace, sequins, knitting—she named "femmages." Her computer-generated painting, OX (1968, below), is notable, says artnet, "for its embrace of vaginal imagery and focus on the body," which became a hallmark of the work of other feminist artists.

Artist **Mira Schor**, at hyperallergenic.com, eulogized Schapiro.

"Her death brings up enormous issues about feminism, legacy, and about the role an artist plays in how she enters a history she helped to create—even the idea that such a history could and should exist, one that included the voices and images of women."

FROM THE LILITH BLOG



RAINBOW JEWS THREATEN A BLACK-AND-WHITE WORLDVIEW

It is tempting to read Yishai Schlissel's terrorist act at the July Jerusalem Pride Parade—stabbings claimed the life of Shira Banki, a 16-year-old marcher—as confirming the opposition between the religious and secular realm.

Schlissel's words indicate that he seeks to limit the very definition of Jew to those who believe that same-sex love and desire is an abomination. But photos shared on social media challenge that definition of Jewishness in particular and instructive ways.

A rainbow yarmulke and tallit, a rainbow flag with a Magen David at its center, and the participation of such groups as Bat Kol, the religious lesbian organization, affirm the intersection of queer identity and religious identity. That crossroads is, of course, a danger zone for haredi homophobes because it means that they can no longer claim to be the only essential and authentic form of Jewish and Judaic being. To haredi homophobes, rainbow Jews threaten a black and white worldview that seeks to falsely represent itself as that of "every Jew."

HELENE MEYERS

DOCUMENTARY

"A Typical North London Jewish Girl with Attitude"

Amy Winehouse died of alcohol poisoning at age 27 in 2011. A new documentary film, "Amy," now in wide commercial release, has us reflecting on the life of this complicated and preternaturally gifted jazz singer.

When Winehouse belted out her raw, original songs—a combination of jazz and R&B—in her throaty contralto, she mesmerized listeners. Besides having a visceral musical talent, she had an unmistakably Semitic beauty accentuated by an outrageous fashion sense. We couldn't stop listening to her, or looking at her, even as her illnesses were destroying her; in addition to addiction to alcohol and drugs, she suffered from bulimia and depression. In fact, the sicker she became, the more the public gawked. The documentary uses hundreds of film clips and the voice of the singer herself, along with the people who loved her, to tell her tragic story.

From the film's beginning, viewers already know, and dread, her story's ending. But as we watch it, we experience a revelation: although the media left us with the image of Winehouse as a depraved junkie, she was most of all just a young girl. Fame came to her too fast, and it devoured her. As the film demonstrates, other factors made her particularly vulnerable. She adored the men in her life—first her father, **Mitch Winehouse**, and then her husband, **Blake Fielder**. But both betrayed her.

In "Amy," directed by **Asif Kapadia**, we meet the singer as a pleasantly *zaftig* and giggly teenager whose life was music. At age 16, she already had a manager. By the time she was 21, she was famous. But, as the movie makes clear, she never wanted that fame. "Once the public sees me they'll realize I'm not good for anything but making music," she tells a television interviewer in 2005 with a disarming ingenuousness. Watching this clip four years after her death, the viewer hears in her remark an unbearable poignancy.

When Amy was nine, we learn, her parents split up. Her father, a cab driver and amateur singer, had been seeing another woman from the time his daughter was a baby. Amy was devastated by the divorce. She acted out by cutting school with her boyfriend and smoking weed. Her mother, **Janis**, tells an interviewer that she was too much to handle. Amy needed her father back, and—ironically—he was often photographed at his daughter's side after she became famous. But the film does not make clear whether he was available to his daughter when she was a child. At 21, Amy Winehouse met and she fell madly in love with Blake Fielder, who soon introduced her to hard drugs. Then he, like her father, abandoned her. She found expression for her pain by writing songs such as "Love Is a Losing Game" and "Back to Black."

Amy at her home in Camden town, 2004.

"A typical North London Jewish girl with attitude," is how **Nat Gatfield**, who signed her on to Island Records, describes her in the film. Winehouse was clearly proud of her Jewishness: She accessorized her outrageous outfits with a large gold Star of David around her neck.

ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

"We need to say that women have sex, have abortions, are at peace with the decision and move on with their lives. We need to say that it is their right, and, moreover, it's good for everyone that they have this right: The whole society benefits when motherhood is voluntary. When we gloss over these truths we unintentionally promote the very stigma we're trying to combat. What, you didn't agonize? You forgot your pill? You just didn't want to have a baby now? You should be ashamed of yourself."

From **Katha Pollitt**, "How to Really Defend Planned Parenthood," New York Times, August 5, 2015.

AMY WINEHOUSE MARK OKOH, CAMERA PRESS LONDON

Choosing To Be A Foster Mom

by TAMAR FOX

In my biological family it is, ironically, becoming foster parents that runs in our genes. Because of my family history (more on that later) I feel a pull—much stronger than toward any other mitzvah—to foster children who need homes. Yet for most Jews, this is an issue that has fallen off our radar.

Here's my story.

The city where we live—Philadelphia—has no dearth of children in need of homes. From newborn infants to teenagers, more than 100,000 children a year will have some contact with Department of Human Services, which handles child abuse and foster care. So in 2014, my partner, Jesse, and I began the process of becoming foster parents. We chose to foster through Jewish Family and Child Services, but at our orientation we were the only Jews signing up for this new role, and observant Jews were so unlikely to sign up to be foster parents that JFCS only offered training for foster parents on Saturdays; special arrangements had to be made to accommodate us.

We were fingerprinted, background-checked, instructed in CPR for children. We led social workers through our home, pointing out our smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.

Then, three months later, as I was cooking Shabbat dinner on a Friday afternoon, my phone rang, with a social worker from the agency asking if we wanted to take a one-month-old baby girl just being discharged from the hospital. Jesse was stuck in traffic. I was alone with this decision and my pot of soup, and I said yes, we would take her.

In the middle of our Shabbat dinner came a knock on the door, and…there was our daughter. Her medical records described her as "pink and irritable." That first night she was exactly that. She wanted desperately to be swaddled, but with only three hours' notice we were able to collect only the bare basics of newborn supplies—and that hadn't included swaddles. We improvised with a towel, and the sash from my wedding dress to cinch her in, and—finally—this exhausted baby slept for a few hours.

Soon Dafna—the Hebrew name we chose to call her at home, in memory of my mother—went from pink to tan, and from irritable to relaxed. I started a new job. We found her a daycare spot. And twice a week someone from the agency came to daycare to pick her up and bring her to a supervised visit with her mother.

What did the separations feel like to me? Dafna was always returned to us from these visits wearing a different outfit from the one we'd dressed her in that morning. (I would not have bought her onesies saying "Mommy loves me," and I cringed when she came home in them.) When her mom sent us notes in the diaper bag, they invariably soured my mood. When she gently requested that Dafna wear socks, or that she wear more layers, I rolled my eyes. I didn't think I was a perfect parent, but *I* wasn't struggling with addictions, *I* hadn't given birth to a baby addicted to drugs.

But when I finally met Dafna's mom, Mimi [a pseudonym], at the pediatrician's office, I was humbled. It felt like we were all auditioning—trying to prove each of us was good enough to raise this child. I wanted Mimi to like me, she wanted me to like her, and we were both mostly worried about making sure Dafna was safe and happy. When the doctor was thrilled with her progress, we all celebrated, in a shared triumph that this baby girl was now thriving, despite her rocky start.

Opposite: "Breastfeeding" Adira. Above: Dafna at one, Adira three months.

In our city, thousands of children a year might need foster homes. Yet we were the only Jews signing up for this role.

Dafna smiled easily, slept deeply, ate ravenously, and grew remarkably. At 4'11" I never imagined I would raise a child who would reach the 98th percentile in height, but Dafna's legs seemed determined to reach the ground as soon as possible. And while Dafna grew, Mimi worked diligently to regain custody. She showed up for every visit, and every doctor's appointment. When I was able to let down my guard a little, I had to admire how hard she was working for Dafna. She enrolled in Family School, a parenting program that met for classes six hours a day, two days every week. I couldn't imagine spending 12 hours a week having people tell me how to parent; it seemed like a nightmare. But Mimi enjoyed it, and loved how much time she got to spend with Dafna. I saw that the baby was learning things in the classes, too.

A judge, after six months, ruled that Mimi could have unsupervised day visits with Dafna. We met Mimi for these visits at a coffee shop near our house, and she was always precisely on time, or early. She brought everything a baby could need. She was warm and polite to us, and invariably overjoyed to see her daughter.

Gradually, gradually, I came to realize that Mimi was going to clear all the hurdles set up by family court. Privately, I had been hoping for her failure. Despite knowing that the goal of the foster system is to reunite families, I'd been wishing we'd be able to adopt Dafna. But watching Mimi with Dafna I knew they should be together, even as I felt my chest tighten with grief at the thought of saying goodbye to the baby.

As this probability increased, we prepared a ritual to acknowledge—to ourselves most of all—what this experience had meant. We needed to celebrate that Dafna was being reunited with her birth mother, and at the same time acknowledge the hole that her absence would leave for us.

On a Sunday just after Passover, our house filled with friends and family. We served Dafna's favorite food, soup (we had seven kinds on offer), and created a short ritual based on the phrase from a baby naming wishing that a child will grow up to Torah, *chuppah, v'maasim tovim*. Torah, the wedding canopy and good deeds. In the ritual we told Dafna about the history of her name and how she came to be in our family. Then we erected a chuppah, representing shelter and peace, in our living room, and stood under it with Dafna. We sang a song together, and we all shared with Dafna our wishes for her, both big and small. We wished, among many other things, that she would go on to do good things for herself and for many others. We closed by singing Shalom Aleichem, because it ends with the verse, "May you go in peace."

The day before my 31st birthday was the day a judge ordered that Dafna be reunited with her mom. It was a Friday, and before Shabbat came in we met Dafna and Mimi at the coffee shop where we'd done so many hand-offs before. We hugged Dafna and gave her blessings. As we said *Shehecheyanu*, praising God for sustaining us to reach this day, my tears leaked out. "Oh, this is not goodbye," Mimi said to me, hugging me as I held Dafna. "We're family." And I believed her. I was sad to see Dafna go, but my heart was not broken. In a strange way, it was fuller than it had ever been.

A week after Dafna was reunited with Mimi, and had officially moved out of our house, we skipped synagogue to meet them at a playground on Shabbat morning. When Dafna saw us she threw her arms out and laughed with delight. We were overjoyed to see her, too. In just a week she already seemed taller, stronger, older. Mimi, Jesse and I stood around the swings, pushing Dafna back and forth. Her smile was enormous, and infectious. And then Mimi asked, "So, you aren't going to foster again until the end of the summer?" The question sounded strange in my ears. Why should she care at all now that Dafna was back with her?

"Yeah," I said, "I think we're just going to take a few months to relax, and then go back on the list in September." We were also waiting for me to have been at my job for one year, at which point I might be eligible for some paid maternity leave.

Mimi looked away as she spoke. "Oh. Well. It's just that… my sister just had a baby girl, and I wasn't sure if you would be interested in fostering her…."

For a small fraction of a second Jesse and I looked at each other, our eyes meeting in surprise and joy over the arc of Dafna in the swing. "Yes," I said. "Yes, we'd love to."

It took a month, ultimately, during which we played bureaucratic chutes and ladders with the private agencies. Think you've made progress? Head back to the start. Fill out paperwork, ask to speak to a supervisor, two steps forward, one step back. Promise again and again that you are interested in this child; it's like you are trying to convert to Judaism and have to be ritually refused three times. Then one day a call came, asking can we take the baby tonight. And we said yes.

So less than one year into foster parenting, we're nurturing the second infant from one family. Dafna and our new daughter, whom we call Adira ("powerful" in Hebrew, because she has such a powerful hold on our hearts and because it comes close to the meaning of the name her mother gave her) are first cousins—their mothers are sisters—and also second cousins—their fathers are cousins. And my seven-year-old stepdaughter, Jesse's daughter, who lives with us half time, is delighted to have yet another baby to "mother" when she's with us.

Now it's the cries of little Adira that I answer in the middle of the night. Her forehead that I kiss, her angry puckered face that I comfort when she's tired or hungry. And sometimes Dafna's voice mixes with Adira's, since we see Dafna often, keeping her overnight on weekends so that Mimi can work a late shift at her new job. We are family now, with this other family. Each day we knit our lives more tightly together. And each day these ties feel stronger, warmer, special—and strange. We have taken a baby into the intimate rhythm of our lives—and into our hearts—knowing that the relationship might not last.

We knew we needed a ritual to celebrate that Dafna was being reunited with her birth mother—and to acknowledge the hole that her absence would leave for us.

Dafna with Tamar and Jesse the day she rejoined her mom.

Clockwise from top left: Dafna loves the water; Jesse and Adira; Dafna, age one, and Adira, three months.

So why do I do this? My own story as a foster parent is very Jewish. It starts with the Holocaust.

My grandfather escaped Vienna in 1938 on the Kindertransport. He was 14, which I always thought was unusual. I pictured the Kindertransport as being full of small children, not teenagers. But now I think how much worse it must have been for the teenagers, who knew exactly what kind of danger they were escaping, who had some sense that they were leaving their homes and would probably never be back, might never see their parents again.

When my grandfather, Walter, arrived in England, he was fostered by an English Jewish family in London, the Adlers. I don't know much about them other than that they were in comfortable circumstances, that they had a maid. And that they saved my grandfather's life. Without their sponsorship, it's unlikely he would have survived.

Walter spent six months with the Adlers; after he felt confident in his English, he transferred to a technical college in Leicester. In 1943 he went to Cincinnati, where he was able to connect with his parents, who had also managed to escape the Nazis. Walter was drafted into the U.S. army and went back to Europe, first as an engineer and then as a translator for the War Crimes Investigating Team, which took statements from former concentration camp guards.

My mother grew up knowing this story, and was conscious that her own existence had been made possible by the Adlers. When I was a child she took me to meet Mrs. Adler when we visited England.

My mother's life, too, was shaped by what she knew of the family's history. In the winter of 1979, when my mother was 26 and a poor social worker, she and my father sponsored two refugees from Vietnam, Mai and Thai Tran, teenage siblings who had escaped Vietnam on a boat, living in a refugee camp in Indonesia until my parents, though the Jewish Federation in Chicago, brought them to stay in their living room. My dad got Thai a job, and now, more than 30 years later, the siblings still live in the Chicago area. Thai and Mai have flourished, in no small part because my parents sponsored them.

But both of these examples from my own family's history differ from my own experience in a salient way. My spouse and I, thus far, have been foster parents to newborns, and the bonds we feel for these babies are forged from different interactions than those of Mrs. Adler with a 14-year-old refugee or of my parents with Mai and Thai.

Some people, when they see my posts on Facebook or find out my relationship to the baby I'm bottle-feeding as I cradle her in my arms, ask whether we intend to have biological children of our own. Here's why not: I am not in love with my Ashkenazi Jewish genes. My mother died at 55 of breast cancer, and given my family's genetic history, my chances of living to 55 are low. I do not want to pass along these genes. So being a foster parent—and perhaps down the line becoming an adoptive parent—is the route I'm taking toward motherhood.

And I'm encouraging other Jews to consider this option.

Evangelical Christianity has been promoting fostering as a means of spreading Christian gospel, sometimes employing strict parenting philosophies that include corporal punishment, and hostility to LGBT children. Fostering, to them, is a means of saving a body and a soul.

And some people living in poverty choose to foster because each child comes with a subsidy, a small per diem paid to the foster parents. Many of these foster parents are caring and wonderful, but living in poverty comes with its own stresses and possible traumas.

The infrastructure for Jews in the foster world is already present. The agency that certified us as foster parents is Jewish enough that it is closed for Jewish holidays (even the oft-forgotten Simchat Torah, and Shavuot). The non-Jewish intake worker who shepherded us through our certification made me laugh when she would call and identify herself as, "Keisha, from the *Jewish*." Jewish family services agencies have a long history of helping foster children, dating back to a time when there were many more Jewish children in the foster system, perhaps as disease or childbirth claimed the lives of mothers in an earlier era, and fathers could not care for their children alone, or because poverty forced this choice upon some families. But as Jews have edged higher and higher into the middle class, fewer Jewish children end up in foster care. The institutions remain, now working

From left: Tamar and Adira at synagogue. Tamar's grandfather, Walter, 1931. Sam Fox, Bev Fox, Thai Tran, Mai Tran, 1979. Tamar, Jesse, and Dafna, August 2014.

mainly with other groups that suffer from poverty, sometimes complicated by drug and alcohol addiction.

I don't want to—and can't—paint a rosy picture of foster parenthood. There are so many times when I have felt defeated, depressed, or exquisitely furious at the way the foster system "works." In Pennsylvania, new reporting laws have led to more children being placed in care, with no extra resources devoted to the system. In Philadelphia, children are falling through the cracks as new private agencies try to staff up. I've become accustomed to hearing the same truthful answer for each one of my questions: "I don't know."

All of which makes me wish that the Jewish community I know and love—the one that rallied to supply us with a month's worth of meals after Dafna arrived with no warning, that cares about social justice, the one made up of many, many helping professionals like social workers, doctors, lawyers, rabbis—would bring their attention to children in foster care.

This year, when so many of my friends have been acknowledging their privilege, I have vowed to take my privilege and use every last bit of it to help get the best possible care for my two biracial foster children. I've called local lawmakers, written angry letters, passed around petitions, and bent the ear of anyone I could think of. Why did it take three months for Mimi to be given goals to work toward reunification? What exactly are the standards for foster parent training, and why did ours involve watching a VHS safety video that the trainer later announced was "probably out of date"? Why is there no centralized list of the resources and social services available to foster parents, from subsidized day care to free formula to help paying for music lessons or summer camp? Who is responsible for the fact that Adira arrived at our home with two pieces of paper, both of which had the wrong name for her?

Part of the reason I want the Jewish community to take up this cause is because I'm certain that the Jewish women I know would not stand for the level of dysfunction I see every day. Jewish mothers are known for being overbearing, even demanding. These aren't considered positive traits, I know, but I sometimes daydream about how great it would be for some of the children in the foster system to live with a mother who cared for them in the extreme ways Jewish women are known for. I want all my white friends who have guiltily owned up to their racial privilege to cash that privilege in for access to lawmakers and agency heads. I want rabbis preaching about fostering from the *bima*. I want it to be something a wealthy family with a maid considers doing. I want it to be something a young newly married social worker talks her partner into. It has been like this before. Why can't it be again?

Many of my friends are in the throes of building families, and some are struggling with infertility, or trying to figure out how to build a family as a same-sex couple, or as a single person. Adoption is expensive and can be risky, but it's common in my social circles, while fostering is not. Certainly fostering has its own risks, but I wish it were at least on the radar for people thinking about how to create their Jewish families.

Jesse and I became certified foster parents just a few days before Passover in 2014, and when we finally reached this goal I thought, suddenly, of Moses. As a baby, Moses was at great risk, so his mother put him in an ark on the Nile, where Pharaoh's daughter plucked him out of the water, and brought him up in the palace. It was a foster child who led my people from bondage to freedom. I don't want to put any pressure on Dafna or Adira to become Moses, but I do wish my community stood by the water's edge and plucked out some of the children floating by. ■

Tamar Fox is a writer and editor living in Philadelphia. Her children's book No Baths at Camp, *published by Kar-Ben, is a PJ Library selection.*

When Is Daddy Coming?

by MARJORIE ORDENE

I opened my front door and Dad brought Mom in, carefully unzipping her long down-filled coat and handing me her water bottle and a bag of disposable underwear. He reminded me when she would need to eat, drink and use the bathroom. Then he kissed her soft, wrinkled cheek, stroked her balding head, and drove off to attend his dental lecture.

At 85, my dad was probably the oldest active member of the 2nd District Dental Society and certainly the oldest one still practicing. Me, it was my day off from my medical practice. I never see patients on Fridays, and Ari, my 10-year-old, wouldn't return from school for another eight hours. I had all day to be Mom's babysitter.

It was my day off from my medical practice, so I had all day to be Mom's babysitter.

She looked around the kitchen as if she had never seen it before. I took her hand and slowly led her around: "This is the kitchen. Now we're in the living room. See the painting from Aunt Bea? Here's Uncle Ira's piano...." She dutifully followed me, looking wherever I pointed. She didn't talk much anymore beyond what was absolutely necessary.

My mother was a small woman, five feet tall, but of late seeming shorter by the week. She had always been irresistibly cute, a trait that still served her. On the piano, I showed her a framed photo of herself as a teen—dark expressive eyes radiating serene composure. She had a widow's peak, olive skin, and a nose so perfectly proportioned that a plastic sur-

PHOTO: ANNA MOLLER

geon once stopped her on the street and took measurements.

These days, though, Mom's eyes stared vacantly and her olive skin sagged. This didn't concern her. She didn't care that she'd grown stout, that her belly hung ample and flaccid. Though her legs were still glamour-girl perfect, she walked with a wide-based gait and sat with her knees apart, not the least bit self-conscious. When I pointed out the photo, she said, matter-of-fact, "I used to be beautiful." She didn't add "but not anymore!" as she used to, making me a confidante to her regrets.

For over 10 years, my mother had been drifting into the murky waters of Alzheimer's. At first she had trouble recalling words. Thermostat. Smoke detector. One day she called to say she couldn't operate her sewing machine. Driving followed several years later. When we went to a hotel for Passover, my normally outgoing mother refused to sit next to anyone who wasn't family. She confided that she was afraid she couldn't follow a conversation.

These events didn't discourage me. My medical practice is holistic, in a home office like my Dad's. Finding unconventional treatments for difficult conditions had become something of a specialty: Autism, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue—if I could help these patients, surely I could help Mom.

First I went through a range of nutritional supplements, but Mom resisted swallowing pills. Next I ordered plant-derived drugs only available in Europe. Then I brought her to a memory-training center. After that, to a program for frail adults that met five days a week. Still, she deteriorated.

On Sundays, when I visited my folks, I'd find her lying diagonally across the bed, eyes closed or staring into space. I did not give up. When Dad asked if she could stay with me while he attended his conference, I was keen to do it. If I observed my mother for a whole day… well, maybe I'd figure out something new.

I carefully led her up the stairs, down the narrow hall to my bedroom and into the pink and green glider I'd bought long ago to nurse my son. I arranged Mom's feet on the wooden footstool and put her arms on the rests. Then I showed her the set of building blocks I'd retrieved from the basement, once a favorite of my son's.

"Look, Mom. This is fun!" I put the box of colorful wooden pieces on her lap and showed her all the ways they could be connected. No combination was wrong. I blabbed on about how Ari and I had once made a mammoth sculpture using every piece in the set. I shared how having my first (and only) child at 41 made me intensely appreciative of motherhood; with each passing milestone of Ari's—walking, talking, starting school—I'd had a flickering certainty, like watching scenery flash by from a train, that I had to savor it.

She gazed up at me like a wide-eyed child. "Go ahead," I said, "You can do it." She picked up a green oval and hooked it onto a blue rectangle, then looked to me for approval. I handed her a yellow trapezoid. She attached it.

"When is Daddy coming?" she asked.

I stared at her. One would think she'd be happy to be away from him for a while. Over the years I'd come to understand that her married life hadn't turned out the way she'd expected. Working for her husband in a home dental office was a ton more isolating than her former job in the hospital. As a boss, Dad spoke little and demanded perfection. She'd grown accustomed to his clenched fists and rage if she scheduled an appointment for 3:15 instead of 3:30, or bought #9 envelopes instead of #10. She strained to please him.

"Leona, take your pills. Leona, eat your breakfast." Dad meant well, but he was an autocrat.

When I started medical school, Mom considered a job outside the house, but Dad put a quick end to the idea. "Who'd hire you?" I heard him sneer—I was eavesdropping outside the kitchen door at the time, and was stunned by his cruelty.

I sought out someone to marry who was much more easygoing than my dad; my husband would never dream of telling me what to do, let alone casually drop vicious comments.

Those isolating work days ended only to be replaced by Dad nagging and cajoling her: "Leona, take your pills. Leona, eat your breakfast. Leona, drink your water." My dad meant well, but he was hopelessly autocratic. When they'd first married, Mom had assumed they'd be keeping kosher; it was important to her. "That won't be necessary," he informed her. She fell into line, readily melding *milchig* dishes and *fleishig* dishes into one *traif* set. She thought that obeying her husband was a greater Jewish virtue than kashrut. She did light Shabbos candles, though. Presumably, my father didn't object.

"Daddy won't be back for a long time," I told her. "We've got the whole day." She stared at me blankly, then attached another shape.

"Good job, Mom!" I said brightly, despite creeping despair. Thank God, I thought, I didn't come of age in the '40s, like Mom. Jewish women her age, especially suburban ones, stayed home, kept house, raised their families. This would have killed me. While a few of Mom's friends found outlets in acceptable activities like joining the temple Sisterhood or the local chapter of Hadassah, Mom's aspirations didn't venture from home.

"Okay," I said. "Next project." She had always loved old photos, taking some out whenever relatives visited. I chose an album with the earliest pictures and arranged them chronologically. First came the portrait of Mom's father as a young

man, resplendent in black tie and tails, a gold watch chain hanging from his waistcoat pocket. His hair was combed straight back on either side of a center part, his long English mustache perfectly curled.

"Who's this?"

"Daddy!" she chortled, a little girl again, in love with her father. It wasn't the same when we got to early photos of Dad. "He's handsome," she said, but the girlish excitement was missing.

Did my mom love my dad? I remembered her telling me once when I was a teen that she should have divorced him. "He's impossible," she said. Yet she never left him. Once I openly confronted them: "If you hate each other so much, why don't you divorce?"

"We've talked it over," they each said. "And we've decided we really do love each other and want to stay married." I remember thinking they were both trapped. Too scared to start over.

I continued turning the pages of albums. Here was Mom at her high school graduation, dressed all in white, with short-cropped hair and a shy smile. Here she is in an art gallery, posing in a schoolgirl's suit for a photographer-friend. Here are glamour-girl pictures: Mom as a sultry beauty in a hammock, an anonymous, adoring admirer at her side; on her honeymoon in her two-piece bathing suit, her long hair wavy like a 1940s movie star.

"Do you remember your honeymoon, Mom?" In the past she would have told me stories, but now she just turned the page.

"When is Daddy coming?" she asked.

"Not for a while," I answered, a little sigh escaping my mouth. Could it truly be that she was at loose ends without him? I mean, from the moment she opened her eyes in the morning until the moment she closed them at night, *there he was*, sitting beside her through endlessly long meals, wiping her mouth, spreading Vaseline on her lips. Though condescending and often rageful, he always knew how to be a caretaker.

"Who's this, Mom?" I asked.

"Margie," she said, like a child tentatively answering a teacher.

She thought that obeying her husband was a greater Jewish virtue than kashrut.

"And where is Margie now?"

She stared at me. "You," she said finally.

"Yay!" I exclaimed, trying to ignite something, but the pilot light—*was* there a pilot light?—was out. A few years earlier, Mom understood what was happening. After cognitive testing, she insisted on reading the five-page report.

"It says I'm an idiot," she said.

We'd moved even beyond that.

Suddenly I was famished. "Let's have lunch," I said. Mom wasn't particularly interested, but she tackled the egg salad and tomatoes with obedience. Eating had become a slow and tedious process. She'd almost forgotten how to chew, never mind swallow.

"When will Daddy be here?" she asked again. I was incredulous: Was this *love*? Was it a further sign that no one was *in* there?

Fighting back hopelessness, I brought out another photo album. Here was Mom lying on a couch with a toddler perched on her back. Here she is in a black, scoop-neck top and flowered half-apron, presiding over a children's birthday. Here in a long, white-wool coat, guiding her three-year-old and five-year-old on a winter's walk in the backyard. Without warning, a warm nostalgia washed over me: here was my beautiful, competent, loving mother.

She glanced at the black-and-white photos and asked, "When is Daddy coming?"

I shook my head in resignation. Maybe they *were* happy. Who knows? Who can really tell from the outside? Maybe she hadn't expected much. She certainly was well taken care of. My father saw to that, always buying the old-fashioned American cars with the boat-like rides to cushion her bad back, quietly waiting while she took her time dressing, bringing her her favorite treat of ice cream and diet soda in bed. Was this love? Was this Tevye-and-Golda love?

We moved on to color photos. Mom in red lipstick and pearls. Mom at my brother's bar mitzvah. Mom alighting from a boat in Amsterdam. (She hated travel but did it to please Dad). Mom blowing out the candles on their 45th-wedding-anniversary cake. Yes, they made it that far. They stuck it out and became one of those married couples like in the old TV shows—well, maybe not as happy as Ward and June, but maybe passably content. Hearing Mom continually asking for Dad, I realized there might have been a whole dimension that I knew nothing about. Maybe they'd passed through misery to accommodation, through accommodation to acceptance, through acceptance to love.

We returned to the wooden building set. She was slowly getting the hang of it. When the perseverative question re-arrived, I simply reassured her.

"Soon, Mom. Daddy will be here very soon."

At around 2 p.m., after more games and projects, more photo albums, more hard-to-fill spaces, the phone—hallelujah!—rang. At last, the words we'd been waiting to hear. It had been a trying day, and, despite my best intentions, I no longer felt sure of myself or of much of anything.

"Mom," I said, relieved to bring her the good tidings. "Daddy called. He'll be here in a minute."

She put down her red wooden circle and looked me in the eye.

"Too bad," she said. ■

Marjorie Ordene is a physician and writer. Her work has appeared in Tablet, The Sun, Michigan Avenue Review, and various anthologies.

Wallpaper

by HESTER GOLDSTEIN*

DECEMBER 2013

We're standing in line at the Reindeer Express when she broaches the subject. She, meaning my sister Sarah. Married now for the second time and happily at that…though it's only five months into the marriage, so my fingers are crossed pretty tight. Her sons—my nephews—are eight and six, and we're holding their coats and lunch bags amid throngs of parents ready to shoot themselves if winter break doesn't end, like, tomorrow.

The subject is marriage, of course. It's something she knows quite a lot about, though I don't know if I want the kind of knowledge she's accrued. I'm too intimately acquainted, perhaps, with the details of her first marriage—and the ensuing divorce.

"So what's up with Peter?" she asks casually, referring to my ex-boyfriend of five years.

The question catches me off-guard, so I watch the girls board a candy-cane striped train car before answering. "I don't know," I tell her honestly. "We haven't spoken in months."

She was never a fan of his, since she didn't think he was Jewish enough to be marriage material, and she's relieved I've closed this chapter of my life. "Okay," she says, making quick work and moving on to the subject she's really after. "So when are you gonna get serious about meeting someone?"

This last part is a familiar conversation. I brace myself. "What do you mean?" I ask, playing dumb.

"You *know* what I mean. You're not 25 anymore." (She's right. I'm 30. In some circles, 30 is 50.) "Your problem is you're too picky," she says sagely. "Take it from me, second time around: You can't be so picky."

I shift my bags from one arm to the other, smile amusedly

*Because of the sensitive nature of this essay, all names (including the author's) and locations have been altered.

at the ground and remain silent, because what I really want to say is something she doesn't want to hear: I have met someone, though he's the furthest thing possible from marriage material. At least in her mind. Maybe in mine, too. We haven't gotten far enough to know.

In the world I come from—Orthodox Judaism and political conservatism—Adam has about a thousand strikes against him: He's a colleague. His boss is my mother. He's super-liberal (my father is William F. Buckley reincarnate, except not as civilized). His living room is crammed with books on topics that are railed against at nearly every family gathering: socialism, labor wars, corporate greed, and Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. Oh—and one more thing: He's not Jewish.

The first time I visited his apartment, I spent about 20 minutes walking silently from bookshelf to bookshelf, reading the bindings but saying nothing. His walls—apricot-colored, warm and soothing—seemed almost contradictory in their safety. I had been given a taste of what to expect, of course—we had had enough conversations for that—but seeing these ideas stare back at me in uncompromising black typography was still startling.

This is what my non-Jewish boyfriend doesn't understand: There are no "controversial topics." There is just him, the most controversial topic of all.

He watched me anxiously, though I didn't realize *how* anxiously until that night, when he emailed me: "By the way," he wrote, "I felt something close to naked as you looked over my room, my bookshelves. You were keen, methodical, taking your time to absorb—I felt quite exposed. Thanks for being gentle."

I wasn't trying to be gentle. Mostly I was just shocked into silence, lost in the throes of processing. The books sparked some pretty vigorous discussion about Israel that afternoon, a topic we both follow closely, and when we finally calmed down, he asked me, "Do I seem like a crazy person to you?"

I wasn't in a hurry to answer and thought about it seriously. "No," I finally said. "But it's a lot to take at one time. And I shudder to think of what you would say to my father if you two were in the same room."

Adam smiled and reminded me that his father is a very conservative, born-again Christian. "I know how to stay away from controversial topics," he said.

"That's what you think," I muttered under my breath.

This is what Adam doesn't understand: There are no "controversial topics." There is just him, the most controversial topic of all.

Adam is an atheist, a Christian by birth. To him, religion is silly at best and destructive at worst. I'm Jewish, the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors. For me, raised with 13 years of formal Jewish education, a mother who spoke only Yiddish to us at home, and the shadows of the Holocaust constantly quivering in the background, intermarrying is the ultimate "fuck you" to both my grandparents and at least some of my existing family. In fact, it's something that until eight months ago I would never even have considered.

That was before I met Adam—a man who, in brief but radiant moments, gets me at my core so deeply that I often wonder if our cells are communicating with each other while we sleep. It's still hard for me to fathom that I'm falling for him.

PHOTO: SEAN MCCORMICK, FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/MCCORMICKPHOTOGRAPHY

Especially because, in his passion to march to the beat of his own drum, he's, well…just like my father.

Driving home from the winter carnival, my nieces asleep in the backseat, Sarah broaches the topic again. I am riding shotgun. "Have you considered the Upper West Side?" she asks, as though the first part of this conversation wasn't six hours ago.

She knows I will connect the dots. The Upper West Side is a Manhattan neighborhood notorious for its high-priced and cramped rentals, but also for the number of 20- and 30-somethings who have settled there—temporarily—looking to find their *beshert* (Jewish partner).

I've visited the area enough to know it's a meat market, hardly the place where I'd find someone my speed. Sarah is well aware of this too, so I don't bother to answer her question.

"OK, fine," she says, relenting. "Then what about Encino?"—the LA version of the Upper West Side, albeit more livable. I choose not to respond to this question, either. But Sarah is getting frustrated. "You have to put yourself out there," she says, as we slow into a stop. "No one's going to do it for you."

The urgency in her voice is almost endearing. I know she wants the best for me, but her definition of "best" is light years from mine. Still, she surprises me a moment later: "You have something very specific in mind, right, Hester? Some people have a much broader idea of what's acceptable. OK. You need something very specific to make you happy."

It's this comment that makes me stop. The truth is, I *don't* have something specific in mind, some "type" that I'm looking for. If I did, it certainly wouldn't have been Adam. But her insights are on target; I am "picky."

I riffle through my mental images of Adam: blue eyes that x-ray me with their boldness; a smile that pushes only the left side of his mouth upward until he decides to let go—at which point his laugh lines reach all the way up to his cheek bones. I think about the apricot walls of his apartment and the way I feel when I'm with him. Is this what makes me happy?

I think about last Shabbat when I checked my email about 10 times hoping for messages from him, and the ridiculous contrast of my leaving the lights on in my living room and the Crock-Pot on so I could have split-pea soup on Shabbat, and how badly I wanted coffee on Shabbat morning but wouldn't turn on the tea kettle because lighting a fire on my stove top is so brazenly a violation of the *d'oraita* prohibition, "Thou shalt not kindle a light on My Sabbath."

I think of all this open contradiction and wonder what that "specific thing" I have in mind is. Six years ago I might have said it was an Orthodox man. Now, I have no idea.

For the last three days I have been holed up in my kitchen, stripping my wallpaper. I think about how satisfying it is to leverage my scraper under the sedimented layers of 1970s floral paper and glue, to hear that crack as the layers come loose and fall to the floor, a pile amassing at my feet.

I feel a little like the wallpaper—hanging listlessly onto my way of life, unglued. Waiting for someone to pry me loose. Adam is prying me loose.

On our second date, when I was beginning to admit to myself that I could no longer call our meetings casual, Adam and I shared a plate of rice and lentils at a local restaurant. I alluded to the fact that we were breaking certain rules, which I assumed he would take to mean workplace boundaries. But he caught on sooner than I thought.

"Are you not supposed to be on a date with me?" he asked.

"Yes." No buffer. Just the reality. "Dating you is like—" there was a sudden crash of pots and pans and I paused to let the noise subside. "Well, it's a little like that."

Adam's response was immediate. "If some institution told me whom I could date, I would reject that."

"Not whom I can date, but the stuff that dating leads to."

"Same thing."

A couple of weeks later, he visited his family in California. He sent me an email: "You've done something to me. I think about you all the time which is strange for me. I can't believe we've known each for so little time, yet here you are inhabiting so many of my thoughts. I wonder what energies of the soul bring that about."

"I know," I wrote back. "This is strange for me, too. I'm not used to being consumed by another person."

"Am I a refresh button for you?" he asked me later, once back in Chicago.

"Yes," I said, "in many ways."

APRIL 2014

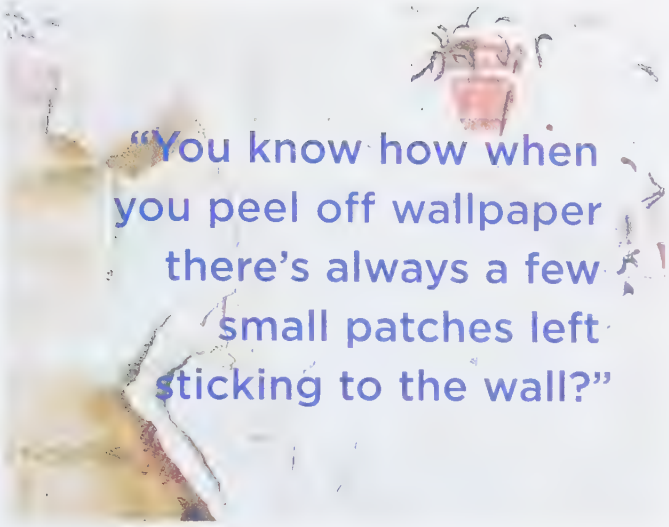
Four months later. Adam and I are together. The relationship is different now, more methodical, more mature. We are learning each other. We've told our friends and family about the relationship—even some close colleagues—though I still haven't told Sarah or my father. My mother and I are cautiously close.

Passover came and went a week ago. It felt oppressive and difficult, words I never would have attributed to this holiday that, for most of my childhood, was synonymous with joy.

On the Shabbat that fell during the holiday, Adam and I went on an errand. He drove, since I am still hanging onto that vestige of keeping Shabbat, though I have let many others go. He suggested stopping for a beer and when I told him I couldn't drink it, since yeast is forbidden during Passover, he grew frustrated.

"It's the first time the restrictions bother me," he said, and I wondered why not before, why now. We had spent multiple *Shabbatot* together at this point, all pretty seamlessly.

Turns out, it was the arbitrariness of my decisions that bothered him, not the decisions themselves. Why keep this rule but break these 10 others? Since it's a question I'm grap-



pling with myself, I didn't have a compelling response. But…I was honest.

"Wallpaper," I told him. "Think of wallpaper. You know how when you peel it off it comes off in pieces? And there's always a few small patches left sticking to the wall?"

Adam finished my thoughts. "So here you are looking at everything you've taken off, and I'm looking at the patches that are still up there and wondering why."

"That's right," I nodded. "And you don't see everything I've taken off, because you only know this version of me. But I'm in flux, and staring at a blank wall is kind of scary. Now that I've taken these layers off, there's nothing underneath."

"Not necessarily," he said. "Maybe there's really pretty wallpaper underneath it, or the textured concrete of the wall. It just looks different. You have to get to know it."

This past Wednesday I moved into a new apartment. It's glorious, with high ceilings, charmingly irregular floors. It feels symbolic of a new beginning. When Adam came over to help me celebrate the move, we debated where to eat.

"How about a kosher holiday?" he asked, somewhat tongue-in-cheek.

"For one day a month?" I laughed, contrasting this with the first Shabbat he spent at my apartment and how careful he was not to mix my meat and dairy dishes. We discussed it for a few minutes, but as we were gathering our coats he turned to me.

"You're not actually taking seriously the idea of a kosher holiday, are you?"

"No," I said, pecking him on the cheek. "I'm not." Maybe one day. I still have to be able to look at myself in a mirror and recognize what I see.

We stroll down the tree-lined avenue, passing by red brick buildings built at the turn of the century, all of them from an era when people took the time to create detailed facades and tile-work. I can't believe I live on such a beautiful street.

As we make our way to the sushi place we agreed upon, I think about my grandmother and something she said to me a long time ago. Her family, all Hasidic, perished in the Holocaust; only she and my great-aunt survived, reunited at Auschwitz. My great-grandmother wore a shaitel (a wig), of course, but in the thick of the Warsaw Ghetto she stopped wearing it. Maybe she sold it for food. Maybe the SS took it. My grandmother didn't know. But why didn't my grandmother wear a shaitel? I always wondered. She was ultra-Orthodox in every other way.

When I finally asked her, she had a ready answer. "Any time I reach for a wig, I hear my mother's protective voice talking to me from the Ghetto: 'It's easy to put on a shaitel, Gitl. But Jewish life is dangerous. What's hard is taking it off.'"

Sort of like the restriction not to drink beer on Passover.

Over sushi, the topic of *kashrut* comes up again. "For you," I tell Adam, "you have a mental battle in your head. Something wins, you come up with your answer, and the way is clear. No leaves to shake off, no emotion."

His blue eyes cloud for moment and I think perhaps I have hurt him, somehow trivialized his own internal process. "Every decision is emotional," he says, sounding hurt. But then he rallies. "And there are always leaves to shake off. So I take them off." He plucks imaginary leaves off his sweater's sleeves and drops them unceremoniously on the floor. And then he shares what it was like for him to tell his parents he was no longer a Christian, no longer politically conservative—conversations that make me tremble inside.

Sometimes I catch myself wishing I could be more like him in this respect: simply honest, no inconsistencies, completely transparent to everyone and every issue. Most of the time, though, I know I'm better off being myself. Even if it's harder.

As I write this, it is Shabbat. I am sitting in an empty room in my new apartment, right in the center of a sun spot. My laptop, a forbidden object on Shabbat, sits across my knees. My phone, also forbidden, sits to my left, playing soothing tunes from Pandora.

This morning when I woke up I thought to myself: You have the entire day to do whatever you want. My day was as blank as the walls that stared back at me. I unpacked a few boxes, mopped my kitchen, then showered and went to shul. It's the first time I've done that in months. If I had no strings pulling at me, no pressures to respond to, no voices guiding me toward something, what would I do?

I went to shul.

And then spent the afternoon writing about it. ■

The author, who grew up speaking Yiddish, is a middle-school history teacher. Her students are the sometimes recipients of her many musings about issues of identity.

Lonely Planet Mikveh

by JANE MEDVED

PHOTO: STANLEY ZIMNY, FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/STANZIM

On the Third Day of Creation, God gathered the lower waters together and called them "seas." The Hebrew word for this gathering is mikveh.

I am in my neighborhood mikveh in Jerusalem. The paint is peeling, and rusted exposed pipes hiss from each cubicle. I reach for my plastic packet from the Ministry of Religion (light-green sponge, foil packet of liquid soap, foil packet of generic shampoo) and encounter another long black hair. I remove it from my body. One stray hair and my dunking won't be kosher. I wrestle with the foil, then rip it open with my teeth. I have armed myself with a second towel (appropriated when the attendant's back is turned) and added a grey pumice stone to the loot. The ritual pool here is teensy: six steps and just enough room to turn around.

A mikveh must contain at least 200 gallons of water, the equivalent of 40 sa'ah, a measurement used in biblical times. The number 40 in the Torah always signals transformation. The flood lasted 40 days. Moses was on Mount Sinai 40 days and 40 nights. Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years.

The place is a dump, but the mikveh attendants' blessings are always worth it. As I climb up the steps, she holds an outstretched towel between us: "May you be blessed with health, an auspicious month, an auspicious week, a good income, healthy children, happiness, peace, all that your heart desires...." I make sure to answer: Amen, Amen, Amen.

Once a pool has the status of a mikveh, it doesn't ever lose it.

A mikveh imparts movement from one state to another: hence, emerging from a mikveh is a rebirth. In biblical times, a mikveh was used to transform something from a state of tumah *to a state of tahara—two words that are often poorly translated as "unclean" and "clean," resulting in misconceptions that mikvaot are essentially bathtubs, which they are not. "Impure" and "pure" are better translations, capturing the spiritual essence.*

I am on the Upper East Side of Manhattan looking for the Chabad mikveh. I have the address written down, but still walk past the unmarked door several times before I realize this must be it. I wave into the security camera and am buzzed in. A few minutes later I am alone in a room with a deep tub surrounded by white marble, a stack of fluffy white towels, a gleaming hair dryer, and artfully arranged spa amenities. There is a makeup mirror and subdued lighting. No sound comes from the carpeted hallways, but plenty of harp music is being piped in from somewhere. This looks more like a suite at the Four Seasons than a mikveh. I suddenly understand why no Jews from New York ever want to leave.

A mikveh can be used by worshippers wishing to enter the Temple sanctuary (though this doesn't exist anymore), by men wishing to enter the Sabbath, by converts, by women in a state of niddah, by pots and pans, by silverware and dishes, by a High Priest (though we don't have these anymore), or for the purpose of removing any ritual defilement associated with death.

A woman's menstrual period signals the end of a possible life. This might seem melodramatic until you know someone who is having trouble conceiving. A woman, after any discharge of blood, enters a state of niddah until she can count seven "clean" days and also immerse herself in a mikveh. Niddah comes from the word nadad, *meaning "removed or separated." During this time she cannot have sex with or even touch her husband.*

For someone who craves privacy, I seem to be constantly taking off my clothes on public beaches. Skyros. Astypalea. The Seychelles. Wasn't there someplace in Thailand, or was that Belize?

We are on the island of Kauai where an empty crescent of beach, under nodding palm trees, curves and stretches and curves again. Strands of Plumeria exhale their scented breath and everywhere the night is blooming. Stars light up the carpet of white sand which is soft, then wet, as it strokes the neck of the Pacific heading towards California. Surprisingly, there is no one else out here. The setting reeks of romance. You'd have to be in a coma not to want to have sex here.

Any body of natural flowing water, such as a river, spring, sea or ocean, can be used with the proper accompanying prayers as a mikveh. The Torah describes the world's most primitive state as water. When a person immerses in the mikveh, that is, they place themselves inside God's creative power.

We are on a nature reserve in Baja, California, home to brown pelicans and schools of dolphins. We've palmed two flashlights off the resort owner, mumbling that we like to take midnight swims. "These should help you see the scorpions," he says, "but watch out for stingrays."

This is news to me. Unwelcome news. Stingrays, apparently, love this bay. They sleep in shallow water under a light dusting

of sand. "Yep, they just blend into the bottom," the owner adds, "but when you step on them, that spiked tail just shoots up and gets you in the calf." He chuckles. "Feels exactly like a bullet."

On the Second Day of Creation, God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters. And let it divide water from water." The waters, once united, are now separated forever, locked into their Upper and Lower Worlds. Some sages believe this created Longing. Others believe it created Argument and Discord, since God does not say on this Day, "And it was good." Instead, God says, "And it was so."

Everyone else in the Stehekin campground is tucked into their cabins, all snuggly under their covers, even though it's mid-July. The stars are out and the glacier-fed lake, when I toe-test, feels like ice cubes.

"I can't believe I'm doing this," I mumble, pulling off my winter fleece and sweatpants. I'm beginning to understand why Orthodox Jews don't go anywhere.

"I'm right here if you need help," my husband says, but he clearly has no intention of going anywhere near the freezing water.

"Just get it over with," I tell myself. But when I jump in, it's an electric shock, a physical blow. It doesn't even feel like cold. I am a marmot, a mink, an otter. I come up for air and see my husband has wandered over and is peering over the edge.

"You son of a bitch," I shriek. "Why don't *you* have to do this?"

The laws of ritual immersion come under the category of chukim*: decrees of God that are not always understood. The lack of an obvious reason for* chukim *makes them acts of faith.*

The Ishbitzer Rebbe (Rabbi Mordechai Leiner, author of Living Waters*) refers to* tumah *and* tahara *as states of being "closed" or "open," "shut down" or "receptive." Therefore, death—the final shutting down—imparts the ultimate state of* tumah*, just as flowing, living water reverses this, imparting* tahara *by virtue of its constant movement and possibility. According to the Ishbitzer, anger—which shuts you off from the surrounding world—also creates a state of tumah.*

I am in the mikveh in Rehavia, which is not the fanciest mikveh around, but it has the latest hours. I am not feeling pure tonight. I'm feeling pissed off. I'm in a rush. I don't have time for this. It took me 20 minutes just to park. As I jam my hand into my toiletry kit, the razor on top slices off a little piece of my finger. Blood gushes everywhere. Then I can't get my effing wedding ring off. I start jamming the bell for the attendant. Banging on the door. "Help. I need some help in here!"

In a ritual immersion, there must be absolutely nothing that intervenes between one's body and the water. Achilles, in other words, was not properly immersed. Neither was Siegfried. The entire body must go under: a misplaced pinky or even a clinging dot of glitter will render the immersion invalid.

It is customary to immerse three times. One explanation for this is that the word mikveh occurs thrice in Torah.

I am in the renovated mikveh in Katamon staring at the back of the door. There is a laminated prayer to be recited before immersion, but it's really long, so I focus on the handwritten sign instead: "Stealing time is worse than stealing money. You can never give it back. Be considerate. There are others waiting to use this room."

I am currently waiting for the woman who managed to get into the ritual pool before me to finish up. Every time she immerses completely without touching the walls the attendant pronounces "kosher." It slowly dawns on me that the woman is taking on extra holy immersions. I stand there in my towel, shredding a Q-tip while she continues to dunk and dunk and dunk. After 30 dunks, I stop counting and start imagining all the things I'd like to say to her.

According to Jewish law, every community is obligated to build a mikveh. This takes priority over building a synagogue, buying a Torah scroll, or any other commandment. One may even sell a Torah to pay for it: harmony between a husband and wife takes precedence over studying the word of God.

We are at a ranch in Wyoming. Cody, the closest city, is two hours away. And while they have a very public

PHOTO: GILLY WALKER, FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/GILLYWALKER

swimming pool here (and a rodeo), neither of these helps my current situation.

We are having a heated "discussion": Does a hot tub in the woods constitute a mikveh. I strongly doubt it, but my spouse's interpretations of halacha tend to bend to fit occasions. He is adamant. "It's rainwater, don't you see?"

He splashes his hand around, moving aside dead leaves and other things I don't want to examine closely. "A mikveh," he deadpans. "'Untouched by human hands!'"

He's riffing on halachic text—a kosher mikveh requires water "untouched by human hands."

"Not funny," I say.

In the middle of the story of Adam and Eve, after describing the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Torah interrupts with a non-sequitur: "And a river went out of Eden to water the garden: and from there it split and became four headwaters." Then the story continues, the river never mentioned again.

The Talmud states that all the water in the world has its roots in this original river of Eden, and even though we can never re-enter the Garden itself, whenever we associate with organic, living waters, we are linked to Eden.

We are in Eilat on a perfect August night, the air sheer perfume. If the Red Sea isn't a cosmic bathtub, I don't know what is. A long pier extends from the beach out into deeper waters where a step-ladder beckons. "I'll stay here and wait," my husband volunteers. "Just walk to the end and slide in." There's only one problem. Despite the extremely late hour, the beach remains packed with vacationers. Radios play, barbeques sizzle, the smoke of grilled chicken and lamb kabobs wafts through chatty groups in their beach chairs, and, oh, did I mention the full moon?

For someone who craves privacy, I seem to be constantly taking off my clothes on public beaches. In fact, it all blurs together: Skyros. Astypalea. the Seychelles. Wasn't there someplace in Thailand, or was that Belize?

"Forget it," I hiss. "No way. I'm too old for this. I want a bathtub. I want a door with a lock."

So we grab a cab and head into the more pedestrian section of the city, back to where the real folks live, the restaurant workers and grocery store owners, the non-vacationers. And, lo and behold, there is a small white building housing a mikveh. I beam at the attendant as she opens the door.

"Thank God you're here," I start to blather. "You won't believe what I was about to do." ■

Jane Medved is the poetry editor of The Ilanot Review, an online literary magazine. Her work has been published in numerous journals and will appear in the forthcoming anthology Manifesting the Female Epic *(Lark Books). A native of Chicago, she lives in Jerusalem.*

POETRY

STONES

I place a small
stone on my father's
marker flat to the ground
to say, your memory lasts
solid and enduring.

I place a small
stone on my father's
marker flat to the ground
to say, rest peacefully
no need to ache and wander.

I place a small
stone on my father's
marker flat to the ground
to say, this pebble, your name,
is carried in God's sling

as long ago the stones of shepherds
tallied with the numbers
of the flock for safe-keeping
across mountain tops. I catch
strains of an ancient song as

I place a small
stone on my father's
marker flat to the ground, that says,
There are men with hearts of stone
and stones with hearts of men..

IRENE SIPOS

A Catskill Summer

by LINDA TUCKER

When I was a little girl, Pagliaccio was my favorite companion. He went wherever I went, and although that wasn't very far in my neighborhood, we traveled well together. The summer of 1945 was the first time Pagliaccio and I were truly going to be far from home, away from the hot pavement and sweltering sleepless nights. We were going to "the country," my mother said, to a place called Monticello where there would be plenty of grass and where I might even have to pull up a blanket when I went to bed. My father, like all of the fathers that summer, would visit on weekends.

Pagliaccio and I waited in the back of our green Mercury while my father loaded all the things we needed into the trunk, onto the seat beside me, and even on top of the car: our own dishes and pots, our towels and sheets, medicinal supplies (in the event that something happened in "the country"), a couple of lawn chairs, suitcases of clothing, cartons of groceries, and a radio and my toys. It seemed as though nothing was left in our house and I wondered how my father would get along.

Pagliaccio sat on my lap during the endless, steamy ride up, his clown hat tilted to the side and his painted face perpetually joyful even with the little tear in the corner of his eye. The heat was so intense that a few times my father had to pull off to the side of the road and open the hood of the Mercury to let the engine cool. After a while I saw one car after another do the same.

When my father stopped for gas, a tall skinny boy began poking fun at our heavily packed car, yelling "kike"—a word I didn't understand—and then suddenly grabbing Pagliaccio out of my arms. He spun him in the air, pulled off his limbs, yanked the stuffing from his side and crushed his face. I don't remember if the boy ran off with Pagliaccio or if my mother, trying to spare me pain, left him behind in a trash bin. I only remember feeling heartsick.

From the moment we arrived at Winitsky's Rooming House, though, we were thrust into a swirl of activities and instant friends and I hardly remembered Pagliaccio. A hoard of friendly-looking people gathered about our car to welcome us, and some children pulled me towards the playground while others shouted that I should join them at the lake.

My grandmother hugged and kissed me and praised me in Yiddish to her friends, women in cotton sundresses immediately invited my mother into their mah-jongg game, and men with the same black yarmulkes that my grandfather had worn slapped my father on the back and accepted him into their group of weekend husbands.

Bella and her father were survivors put into the sympathetic hands of people like the Winitskys; their generosity was the survivors' link to resettlement.

There was so much to do. Blueberry picking, begging the older children to take us out in a rowboat, swinging from the tire on the monstrous oak tree, choosing fresh eggs and a live chicken for Shabbos dinner from Spielmans', the nearby farm. If we watched the baby chicks at Spielmans but managed to refrain from touching them, Fruma Leah would bring out lemonade and freshly baked honey cake and we'd devour them on the white wooden porch. Fruma Leah and my grandmother would exchange recipes. I loved doing everything at Winitsky's, even watching the backs of the women in the communal kitchen-building as they came for their turns three times a day at the separate stoves and sinks for meat and dairy, each moving about in her own way, each singing her own song, each adding marvelous aromas to the dining hall.

On Shabbos, white cloths were laid on the tables and twelve polished sets of candlesticks appeared. Cars began arriving carrying weary husbands and gifts, and families became complete. Listening to the men pray together, the cool air catching their ancient melodies and carrying them across the lawn, I felt cocooned in solidarity.

Although the war in Europe had been over for a while, there was still talk about the tormented suffering of the Jews. I remember we children being confused about why the grownups spoke in hushed whispers about the "camps," since camp was a place to have fun. Some of the people at Winitsky's still had relatives overseas and were deeply worried about their whereabouts. We all said *mi shebeirach*s for these relations, praying that they be found and reunited.

One afternoon two newcomers arrived in our midst, a father and a little girl about my age who clung to his leg as he walked

PHOTO: TOBIASVDE, FLIC.KR/P/54DKY4

up to the main house. My mother said Mr. Winitsky had hired this man to help take care of the grounds. We were told to be especially kind to Bella, the little girl, since her mother had died, and she and her father had endured a lot. I remember one of the boys asking Bella if she'd had fun outdoors at her camp, but rather than answer she just looked pale and not very happy. We decided she must miss her mother.

We tried hard to get Bella to come with us to the playground or to the tire swing or lake, but she only stayed close to her father, following him wherever he went as he mowed the large lawn, clipped the hedges and dragged a very long hose to keep everything green.

When my mother asked Bella if she would like to eat with the other children in the kitchen—even though her father preferred to eat with the other hired hands—she listened carefully and then nodded "yes." She seemed eager to take my mother's hand as we all went to lunch, but then she sat apart from us at the farthest end of the table. When my mother put a plate in front of her, she leaned against her apron as though needing comfort. When she ate, she scooped up her food in huge, ravenous mouthfuls and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, not using her napkin. We thought she had no manners. Soon, we simply ignored her.

The author and her mother at Winitsky's Rooming House, 1945.

One Friday afternoon my father brought me a surprise. It was in a very large package so all the children gathered around. My father said he couldn't find another Pagliaccio, but hoped I'd be happy with the replacement. When I tore off the paper, a huge rag doll with yellow curls bounded into my arms. Her eyes were as blue as cornflowers and her cheeks as rosy as the peaches our mothers chose each week from the fruit seller. I immediately allowed each of the girls a turn to hold her while the boys, of course, ran off to play ball.

Bella stood far from our circle of admirers, watching us intently. And then suddenly, to our surprise, she slowly began to approach us, reaching out for her turn, too. Enfolding the doll in her arms, she said "Esmerelda." Stunned to hear her talk, none of us moved.

"My mama gave me such a doll," she said. Again no one said a word except for Rachel, of a million questions.

"What happened to it?" she asked.

Bella said nothing. Then she handed back my doll and walked away.

"Wait," I called out to her, holding up the doll. "She'll be Esmerelda, too." And that was the first time I saw Bella smile.

For the rest of the summer Bella became my close friend, along with our constant companion Esmerelda. We swung together on the tire swing, wrapping our legs around each other and screaming with joy, while Esmerelda sat under the tree. We walked along the road to the Spielmans' farm taking turns holding Esmerelda. We let the older boys row us across the lake with Esmerelda between us, pointing out the ducks swimming by.

Sometimes Esmerelda caught the dirt from our shoes as she sat watching us run about in a game of tag and Bella carefully took a washcloth to her arm or leg. With Esmerelda and me by her side, Bella softened to the other children at mealtimes, often trading her favorite raisin cookies with a child who didn't like custard.

Slowly she became a Winitskyite.

After that summer, I didn't think about Bella much, but as I grew older I came to realize that she and her father were two of the survivors who were rescued from the camps and put into the sympathetic hands of people like the Winitskys whose generosity was their link to resettlement.

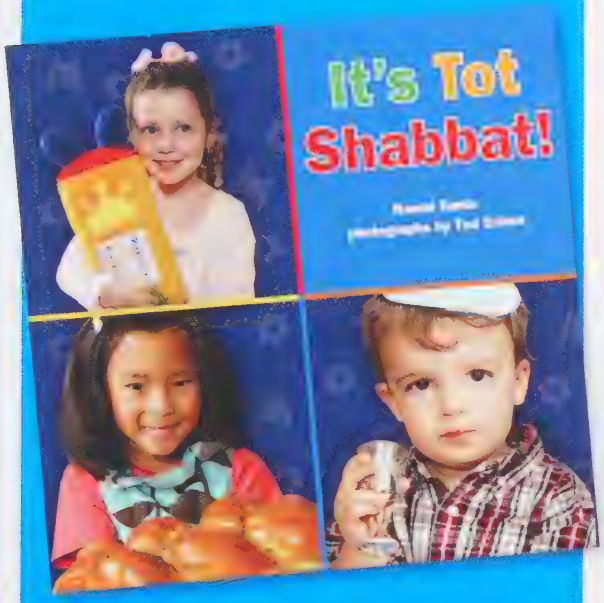
I often marvel that no matter how many books I've read about the Holocaust, no matter how many productions I've seen that bring those devastations to life, nothing has ever illuminated the Shoah more glaringly for me than Bella, the little girl whose trauma and unfolding trust accompanied me one long-ago, very hot summer.

I never knew what happened to Bella and her father, but I often pray that our instant and encompassing community at Winitskys gave them the strength to carry on. Even as a little girl I somehow knew that it was important for one Jew to reach out to another.

Esmerelda helped me with that. And so did Pagliaccio. ■

Linda Tucker is a freelance writer living in Garden City, New York. She often writes about the impact Judaism has on people's daily lives.

"While the grown-ups pray, in another room the children play. This is my Shabbat Club."



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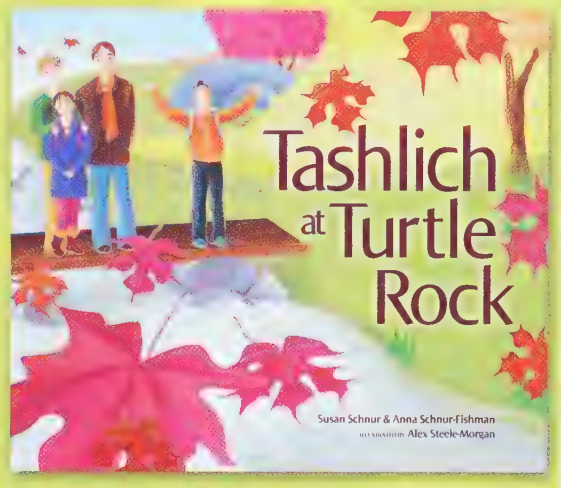

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SMELLING OF APPLES

fiction by AMY FELTMAN

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RACHEL IS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT the perfect line break when she hears Carraway's footsteps. Outside, the leaves are changing color, brassy oranges and sunflower yellows. She stares through the window at the roots of the trees and the dim blue glow of the emergency phone boxes that surround the quad. Carraway knocks on the door: two long, one short, meaning—in carefully calibrated roommate code—that she is not alone. Rachel doesn't answer but swings her legs to the side of her chair, turning her head to see Carraway's entrance.

She is, as usual, smiling widely, her hands entangled in her strawberry-blonde hair, smoothing her ponytail as two strangers, plus brilliant, serious Sergio, pile into the room. They are, yes, quite drunk. They exchange hellos, though Rachel doesn't get out of her chair to shake hands. Sergio lives down the hallway from them. He loves Johnny Cash and imperialist history. The other boy, Noah, seems to be perpetually touching his chin as he thinks about what to contribute in a conversation. Lily is a bleached blonde with Russian cheekbones. Sergio and Noah are the glasses-wearers, though Sergio's frames are stylish and confident, where Noah is mousey and fidgeting. Sergio is determined to remember which dictator he'd studied that had very tiny feet. It is, thankfully, the point in the semester where people had stopped comparing SAT scores as a way of making conversation.

"I brought you the most delicious Triscuits," Carraway exclaims. "And friends! I brought you new friends." She stoops to kiss Rachel's cheek as though Rachel were a delicate flower. "Some of them are wearing glasses," Carraway whispers, as though the eyesight of these fellow freshmen was highly classified information.

"I love glasses," Rachel says, also whispering, accepting the box of Triscuits.

"We're on a mission," Carraway gestures towards the chattering people who have settled onto Carraway's bed. Beaming in Rachel's direction, Carraway announces that they've come to capture her. "We have apples, and we're going to see the moon!" Carraway says. "Wait. Sorry. How's your enjambment jam?"

"Fruitless," Rachel replies, sighing. "It'll come to me. What kind of apples?"

"Red and green," Carraway says. "They're from an orchard. They're everything!"

"Where are you going to see the moon?"

"The roof of Cushing," Noah says, drifting into their conversation. He has beautiful eyes, Rachel realizes: green with specks of yellow clustered in the centers of his irises. He keeps fussing with the yarmulke on top of his head, light blue suede against dark brown curls.

"Will you leave your poem for an adventure?" Carraway asks.

"Can you climb up to the roof in Converse?" Rachel asks. She becomes very conscious of the fact that she is not wearing any makeup. But it was dark outside, she reasoned, and they are all drunk from the free red wine and cheese offered at the campus art gallery. Their teeth are shaded with a rosy glow. Rachel watches the group, absorbing the cadence of their conversation about the attractiveness of famous leaders and presidents (Lincoln: unequivocal yes; some debate about whether Stalin's mustache counts in or against his favor), feeling the friendships forming and the not-aloneness filling her room, the not-aloneness that she can count on here. There were always footsteps outside the door; people washing their hands with bubblegum-pink soap in the bathroom across the hall. Each night, Rachel eventually fell asleep with the sound of Carraway's breathing wrapping around her like a blanket of smoke.

"I don't think there's a climb. It's just a secret window on the fourth floor," Carraway says.

"If there is, we'll carry you," Noah says, a little brazenly, and Rachel blinks up at him in a surprised state of agreement.

Her roommate stoops to kiss Rachel's cheek as though Rachel were a delicate flower.

ON THE WAY TO CUSHING—A corner of campus that's basically Siberia, Lily complains, although nothing at Vassar is more than a twenty minute walk from where you are at any given time—Carraway swoops Rachel by the arm and asks, confidentially, "What do you think of the boy with the yarmulke? Don't his eyes look like mold? Really seductive mold?"

"Such seductive mold," Rachel agrees, laughing. "Do you like his yarmulke?"

"I want you to like him! But not just because of the yarmulke. Did you see how his lips just naturally are lipstick-colored? He's a beautiful doll of a human being."

"I'm not sure that you should tell him that, Car."

"You're right. You're so right. Rachel is full of wisdom," Carraway announces.

"They would've seen it," Noah says. "Lily and Sergio were just talking about the West Wing." Lily and Sergio, Rachel notices, are playing some kind of hand-holding game, their fall jackets woolenly rubbing against each other. Squirrels are skittering up tree branches, their little nails scraping bark as they reach into the sky.

"Okay, this is embarrassing, but I really think—okay. I think of God as a cross between Martin Sheen and John Goodman on the West Wing," Lily says.

"Any other West Wing alums making an appearance in your spiritual version?" Sergio teases.

"The hulk of John Goodman and the face of Martin Sheen," Lily clarifies to

Rachel and Carraway. One of Rachel's shoelaces has come undone, but she doesn't want to stop the group; or, worse, be the only one to stop. Noah seems to be deliberately slowing down his steps, keeping pace with Carraway and Rachel. Lily leans into Sergio's arm, her body looking slight against his rounded shoulders. Her jacket is blue with steely, round buttons down the back, military-style. How can she lean against anything in that coat? Rachel wonders. "Just a hulky President Bartlet."

"I've never thought of God as a person," Sergio says, his voice serious. "Visually. To me it's more like a color."

"Green?" Carraway guesses.

"Green?" Lily repeats. "The color of peas and trees?"

"Blue," Sergio says, sounding a little hurt. "Periwinkle."

"I don't have a picture of God so much as a feeling evoked," Noah says, also suddenly serious. Carraway is the only one still smiling with her big, wine-stained teeth; the boys considering God, Lily trying to look sexy with her feline face tilted to one side. Rachel looks briefly into Noah's seductive-mold eyes. "It's hard to put into words, I guess," he says. He keeps staring at Sergio, trying to catch his eye.

Rachel re-evaluates the mindset of each person: they still seem drunk, loose-limbed as they curve the bend of the trail towards Cushing. "I know what you mean," she says. "I remember memorizing the prayers when I was a kid, singing them all the time. Like, to my Beanie Babies before I put them to sleep at night, or washing my hair—whenever. I was maybe six. The words felt different, somehow. From regular words."

"Different how?" Carraway asks.

"Like the difference between water and Seltzer," Rachel says.

"Carbonated?" Carraway says. Rachel shrugs, matching Carraway's smile. "Something like that," she replies. They arrive at Cushing, Lily swiping her ID and leading the way up. Rachel is remembering the sound of her father coring Granny Smith apples for Rosh Hashanah; the delicate blue-and-white flowered tray with the lavender honey from the farmer's market sitting in an inviting blob in the center. Rachel is remembering the long walk from the subway east, the pre-emptively placed Band-Aids on her easily blistered heels, dress shoes and thick opaque tights. Her dad, older, pronouncing some of the letters differently than Rachel had been taught, and she was embarrassed to hear him say *Baruch ataw Adonai* with a W. The sweat in drops running from Dad's graying sideburns, the glittering band along his collar. He always wore a buttondown to temple, no matter what the temperature was outside. For some reason, in Rachel's memories, it's disproportionately often summer; humid and aching for the fans, the cushioned benches, the single red light hanging in front of the ark.

> It is, thankfully, the point in the semester where people had stopped comparing SAT scores as a way of making conversation.

They ascend in single file up four flights of stairs, Carraway running to get there while Noah and Rachel take the longest. By the time they get to the third floor, Sergio and Lily have disappeared. "True love waits for no one," Noah jokes, mildly panting, and Rachel laughs. How easy they have it, not needing to hide, she thinks, and then tries to let the thought sink to the very bottom of all of her thoughts, like a pebble thrown into a lake. She won't let herself think it. She is loved, here.

Rachel follows Noah into the rickety, questionably safe fire stairway and then, wiggling nervously, climbs out of the window. Carraway hands her a congratulatory apple. The three of them sit cross-legged on the roof, staring into the velvety night. The moon is full, pearly and gleaming.

"We lost two of our compatriots," Carraway says, sorrowfully.

"They'll never see the moon," Rachel says.

"Can you find any constellations?" Carraway asks them. Noah pushes his legs out, leaning on his elbows. He has tiny traces of an auburn beard. Rachel shakes her head, then looks into her lap. Sean pulling her by the hand out of the car, hurrying to find Jupiter in the massive, dark sky; Sean with his hand on the small of her back. Her fingers running along his cheek, the stubble of his chin that felt like it was scratching her skin into pencil-eraser shards. Just this one time, he'd paused for a beat longer than usual, staring back at her. He loves me, she thought, and it sunk down like bitemarks. Then he rubbed her bottom lip with his thumb before he kissed her, softly at first, then hard, harder, mashing his teeth into hers. After, he showed her the North Star, the Big Dipper, Cassiopeia. She knew he didn't know what he was talking about and she didn't care. That night: she held onto it for so long, remembering how things could be.

WHEN THEY CLIMB BACK through the window, Noah is the one to clasp Rachel's hand. He does not comment on the clamminess, doesn't make fun of her for fumbling as she descends. Carraway walks ahead, leaving her sister a detailed voicemail about the day's events. Noah looks at Rachel, smelling of apples.

"What you said before, when we were talking about religion—carbonated? That was a nice way to describe it."

She smiles, unsure what to say besides thank you, which falls out of her mouth so immediately that it feels insincere. "Do you go to services often?" Noah asks.

"I'm not Jewish enough," Rachel says. "I mean, no. I wish I did."

"You should come with me on Friday," Noah says.

"What if I don't remember how?" Rachel asks, and immediately berates herself for how stupid that sounds. "The words," she explains, blushing. "I meant, what if I've forgotten the words?"

"We can sit next to the loud singers," Noah says.

"Drown out the doubt?" Rachel says.

"Exactly."

RACHEL ADJUSTS HER SKIRT SO that it comes right to her knees. She shifts her weight in the hard, plastic folding chair, keeping her legs still so that there is no chance of the prayer-book falling to the floor. The services are held in a strange, wooden barn-type auditorium that's inexplicably attached to the Geology and Geography Building. There are only six or seven rows of chairs. Noah leads her right to the front, as promised. Four girls with severely straightened hair and Steve Madden flats are loudly singing the words to the candle lighting prayer. She smiles at Noah, looks at his eyes through his glasses. She stands with her fingers locked around the back of the folding chair in front of her, toes pointed towards the Torah.

And then it happens: she remembers. The sh'ma and the Amidah and the Bar'chu and all of it, everything, like ants swarming over a piece of cantaloupe; like dunking your head underwater for the first time in a swimming pool and watching the pieces of hair drift away from you, weightless, octopus tentacles of your own self. She knows the unmarked pauses in the Hebrew; she knows when to bend her knees. Her father. Her father sneaking her a sip of terrible, practically rancid wine from a silver cup; picking her up from Hebrew school on Sunday mornings and driving straight to KFC, don't tell Mom, biting into cinnamon-brown super fried chicken breasts and the macaroni and cheese, unnaturally school-bus colored with the warm taste of oozy cheese and the little white plastic spork that came in the individually-wrapped packet with the rectangular napkin that was never enough napkin to actually aid in clean-up, and the purple chairs and crumbly buttery biscuits, two large sodas with Colonel Sanders' face huge on the sides. Don't tell Mom. He was the best cook, but he loved fast food and she'd say What kind of example are you setting? and Are you having a contest to see how bad your cholesterol can get? and Maybe I should just make you a steak and we can dip in butter-salt sauce. Her arms crossed. Rachel remembers him bike-riding, remembers him coming into her room after the bike rides with his face looming enormous and sweat-covered and her shrieking in disgusted delight as he kissed her cheeks before revealing a Peppermint Patty in one hand and a tiny toy in the other, usually a marble, sometimes a rubber ball that had come from a vending machine. Ray, you're gonna be the most beautiful, perfect bat mitzvah girl there has ever been, he promised, but she was never any of those things. After he'd died, Rachel's mother left the temple immediately. Cost-cutting, she'd explained, waving her manicured nails through the air to show the vast expanse of things they no longer needed in their lives.

When they get to the Mourner's Kaddish, Rachel feels something in her chest like a latch unlatching; like a warmth trickling into her, blood rushing, but slowly, honey, dripping, the feeling of breathlessness, of her heart working in a way that is no longer heart-like but something else, unidentified, a jumble of her thoughts thinking themselves, and her skirt is not just her skirt but God's skirt and her feet on God's floor and Noah's eyes, galaxy-like behind glass, and the sound of the words, the gutteralness next to the softness, consonants, vowels, right to left not left to right, we read together, please sit for silent prayer. Her thoughts thinking and unthinking themselves, sunrise, sunset, unlatching, how did she not always feel this, how has this not been the color of every moment, the texture and rhythm and light? Honey, congealing. L'shana tovah, they said to each other, apple slices sweet on their lips: a new year. I'm sorry, she wants to say; I'm sorry that I lost you, I'm sorry I've been gone, I'm sorry. She closes her eyes and the light makes her inside-eyes look a sweet, chocolatey brown and she sees an image of an egg yolk, sun-colored, sun-shaped, the metal sliver of a fork's prong slicing into the egg yolk so that the sunshine spread against perfect, flawless white; and then the sound of Bjork's voice, soaring, elastic, celestial in its rising and falling and Rachel is there, but a herself that feels somehow changed, a degree warmer, her lips are open and she is staring up at the sunlight coming in through the trees, her lips are open and someone is standing there, warm-fingered, holding her, inside of her, tingling and ubiquitous and in a way that seems like sex and almost not-sex and she is thinking I feel everything I feel everything I feel and Noah, tapping her shoulder gently, her eyes opening to see Noah, who says, "Do you want to be alone?" and realizing everyone's gone, her feet are in exactly the same spot, the four straightened-hair girls are talking to the rabbi in one corner of the empty, barn-like room with the wood beams on the high ceiling and Noah has been waiting for her. And Rachel says, "Thank you," and then Rachel says, "Yes." ■

Amy Feltman has been published in The Rumpus, The Believer, The Sonder Review, The Millions, Two Serious Ladies, Gigantic Magazine, and The Toast. She works at Poets & Writers Magazine and is writing her first novel.

ALWAYS A CROSSWORD BETWEEN US

by LESLÉA NEWMAN

ON A RECENT SUNDAY morning I sat at the kitchen table in my fluffy white bathrobe, sipping a cup of hazelnut coffee and tapping one polished red fingernail against a wooden pencil. The New York Times crossword puzzle was spread out before me, and as I searched my brain for a four letter word meaning "gradually give up" a realization struck me.

I have become my mother.

My mother never met a crossword puzzle she couldn't solve. She did the New York Times puzzle every day, scoffing at Mondays which were so easy she found them personally insulting ("You call this a puzzle?") and delighting in the challenge of a Saturday puzzle which might take all afternoon. My mother was many things, but she was not a quitter. (When asked the secret to the success of her 63-year marriage she gave a one-word answer: perseverance.) Every time my mother finished the puzzle—and she always finished the puzzle—she crowed "Ta-dah!" cast the paper aside, and slapped her pencil down on the coffee table with a loud, triumphant smack.

When did my mother start doing the crossword puzzle? When she was a high school student? A sales clerk at Orbach's? A young bride? A new mother? I'll never know. That's one of the many things I never got to ask her.

WHEN THE SUNDAY PAPERS were delivered to my childhood home back in the day before pieces of the Times arrived on Saturday, it was cause for celebration. Sections were passed out like presents: my father handed the Sports section to my older brother, gave me the Book Review, offered the funnies from Newsday to my younger brother, put aside the Business Section for himself, and bowing like an English butler, presented the magazine to my mother. She would be sitting in the den dressed in her fuzzy green housecoat with a cup of instant Maxwell House coffee in a mug marked "The Boss" steaming to her left and a nonfiltered Chesterfield King cigarette in an ashtray shaped like an upturned palm smoldering to her right. Once she had the magazine in hand, she put down her half-eaten bagel, picked up a newly sharpened pencil, and began filling in the little white squares. The room was silent except for the occasional turning of a page like a sigh, and the click-click-click of the tip of my mother's red-polished nail tapping the side of her number two pencil, which she said helped her think.

Sometimes the clues were downright scary: Where to find some very sick individuals ("ICU"). Sign between Gemini and Leo ("Cancer"). Waif ("orphan"). Trounced ("defeated"). End ("finis").

MY MOTHER WAS SMART. Final-Jeopardy smart. Use-all-seven-tiles-and-get-fifty-extra-points Scrabble smart. She could tell you who won the Oscar for Best Actress in 1939 (Bette Davis for her role in Jezebel). She could tell you the state capitol with the smallest population (Montpelier, VT). She could tell you a girl's name that means fighter (Gertrude). My mother knew everything. Well, almost everything. Once in a while an answer eluded her. Usually it had to do with sports. When that happened she'd look over the rim of her leopard-print reading glasses and point her pencil at my older brother. "Who won the World Series in 1959?" she'd ask. "Dodgers," he'd reply without looking up. Sometimes a clue regarding the law stumped her. "Dear," she'd say to get my father's attention. "Who was the only Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from Kentucky?"

"Kentucky?" my father asked as though it were a foreign country he'd never heard of. "Kentucky…." he mulled the word over, stalling for time. "Wait a minute. It's coming to me. Oh, that was….you know… what's-his-name…"

"Six letters," my mother prompted. "Begins with a V, ends with an N."

"Vinson!" my father cried. "Fred Vinson."

"You are correct," my mother said, and filled the letters in.

WHEN MY MOTHER GOT SICK, we started doing the crossword puzzle together. Every morning, after she rose from the hospital bed we'd set up in the den and settled onto her rust-colored recliner with a cup of tea and a piece of dry toast beside her, I handed her the puzzle. She filled in as many answers as she could and then passed the paper to me. "You try it for a while," she'd say. "I'm tired. I'm going to rest my eyes." If it were a Monday or a Tuesday, I usually did well, but if was any later in the week, I'd have a difficult time. "Mom," I said one morning, "what's a 9-letter word for 'lily-livered'?"

"Lily-livered?" My mother's eyes snapped open as her voice rose in delight at the challenge. "Cowardly?"

"Too short."

"Frightened?"

"Too long."

My mother shut her eyes again and I could see that she was counting letters in he head. "Spineless," she declared with confidence, already knowing she was right.

AS MY MOTHER GREW WEAKER and our trips to the hospital became more frequent, I began to measure her state of being by how well she did the puzzle. If she couldn't tell what a trypanophobe fears ("needles") I knew she was having a bad day. If she couldn't tell me an eight-letter word meaning short-lived ("fleeting") I knew she was having a very bad day. And if she told me to just do the puzzle myself, it was all I could do to not break down completely. But being a good daughter, I did what my mother told me, struggling to think of a seven-letter word for depart ("abandon"), a six-letter word for radiologist ("imager"); a five-letter word that meant be overwhelmed ("drown"). Sometimes the clues were downright scary: Where to find some very sick individuals ("ICU"). Sign between Gemini and Leo ("Cancer"). Waif ("orphan"). Trounced ("defeated"). End ("finis").

AND THEN, AS IT ALWAYS does, the end/finis came all too soon. My mother departed from this earth, abandoning my brothers, my father, and me on a Wednesday. The next few days passed by in a blur: we wrote my mother's obituary, held her funeral, sat shiva, and tried in vain to make a dent in the fruit baskets and deli platters that kept appearing on our doorstep. After about a week, the house became quiet. Too quiet. I looked around and saw a pile of newspapers on the coffee table. I offered my father the Business Section which he took. Then he said, "Why don't you do the puzzle?"

I glanced at the magazine section but couldn't even bring myself to open it. "I can't," I said.

"You have to," he lowered the paper. "Your mother would want you to."

"But I'm not as smart as she is." I couldn't bear to speak of my mother in the past tense.

"No one is as smart as your mother," my father reminded me. "But you have to try."

AND NOW IT IS THREE YEARS later and I am still trying. I am sitting in my own kitchen, with the puzzle spread out before me. My coffee has grown cold. My pencil has grown dull. My leopard-print glasses have slid down my nose. "Gradually give up," I read the clue to 34-across aloud. Tap tap tap goes my red nail against the wooden pencil. "Wean!" It comes to me in a flash and as I fill in the letters, I hear my mother's voice in my head say, "Good girl." I put my pencil down and stare out the window. "Mom, where are you?" I whisper. "I don't know how to do this." By "this" I don't mean the puzzle. I can struggle through the puzzle. I'm getting better. Like my mother, I now consider Monday crosswords an insult, though I still don't make much headway on Fridays or Saturdays. No, what I can't puzzle out is how to be a motherless daughter. How in the world am I supposed to live the rest of my life without my mom?

I haven't got a clue. ■

Lesléa Newman's most recent book is the poetry collection I Carry My Mother. *On January 16, 2007, she appeared in the New York Times crossword puzzle as the clue for 32 across: "With 42 across, Lesléa Newman book." (Answer: Heather Has Two Mommies.)*

MY MOTHER IS

Angry at God for her terrible suffering
Bitter because no one knows how to save her
Cold all the time even under three blankets
Dead set on living as long as she's able
Eager to have all this over and done with
Frightened to die though she'll never admit it
Grumpy from pain that she says feels like labor
Hungry for foods she can no longer stomach
Insisting she's fine and needs no one to help her
Joylessly sipping the juice that I serve her
Kinked up from sitting for hours and hours
Longing to smoke cigarettes like she used to
Mourning her life which is fast disappearing
Nervous she'll drop dead with no one beside her
Offended whenever I use the word hospice
Pissed off she needs help to go to the bathroom
Quiet whenever I tell her I love her
Refusing her pain meds for fear of addiction
Scornful of doctors who say not to worry
Trying to make it through just one last summer
Unhinged at the thought of forsaking my father
Vain even now, eighty four years and counting
Weary of being a burden to others
X-ing out names of dead friends in her phone book
Yearning to be with her mother in heaven
Zeroing in on her day of departure

LESLÉA NEWMAN

Reprinted from Lesléa Newman's book of poems *I Carry My Mother* (Headmistress Press, 2015).

The Princess Problem

by ERICA BRODY

My name begins with E, a namesake of my grandmother Esther. So I've spent many a moment, like Jewish feminists before me, wrestling with the in-your-face dualities of the Book of Esther, one that places a would-be hero (and hidden Jew) in a harem of virgins for the king to peruse and use. And it's not just any king. It's Ahasuerus, most famous for banishing Vashti, the queen who refuses the king's drunken command that she flaunt herself before his guests at a feast.

Esther's story makes sublimating one's identity an asset as it trumpets hidden power. Like many of the other takeaways from tales involving royalty, this is not what I want to instill in my daughter. Especially the bit about her family (Mordechai) encouraging her to sacrifice herself and marry this particular king. And yet, here's a mighty woman who risks her life to derail a genocide scheme (Haman's). It's complicated. And it's not just any woman. It's Esther, a queen.

Lately, though, my mornings involve less big-picture reflection and more domestic strategizing. How, for example, can I weave my first cup of coffee into the pretend empire of my household queen, age 4.5, donning a crown (be it a gift, or a headband doing double duty) and a makeshift gown (scarf)?

So now I am yet another feminist parent of a yellow-bedroomed child who swore off gendered childhood (well, swore off reinforcing negative stereotypes) only to find herself walled off by a moat of princess adoration. And now that I'm here, I find it's not what I expected. And that the question isn't about whether we'll face it, but how.

Two Halloweens ago, I asked my daughter if she wanted to dress up. She and her Dada conceived and created a homemade Super Grrrrl costume. Cape included. Last year, she said she'd like to be a queen. Sigh. For a long time after, I was patting myself on the back for what I said next: "You can be a queen, but queen of *what*?" That didn't faze her: Queen of the Sea, she said.

So, with her father's help, that's just what she was—their very own creation included a homemade cape and a seashell-studded crown. But after I said that looking great is nice, I declared, "it's what you *do* that matters." So, together, we figured out what exactly it means to be Queen of the Sea. I wasn't surprised later when father and daughter decided together to make a Paperbag Princess costume for a school project.

A parenting rookie, I thought we'd dealt successfully with the princess/queen thing, which I'd been worried about handling, given the pink-panic warning bells I'd heard from feminist writers, among them Peggy Orenstein's *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Frontlines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture* and, more recently, Sally Kohn's endearing New York Times Motherlode essay, "Daughter to Disney: I'll Take the Tiara, You Keep the Prince." As Kohn put it: "I still can't get decent reception on my cellphone but somehow traditional gender norms are silently communicated and crystal clear."

Of course, like many children, these things are rarely put to bed so easily.

We are in the Strand Bookstore a few months ago, my daughter on a stool in the kids' section at a short table where a dozen princess books she's amassed stand neatly stacked. I sit down next to her on a too-small chair. Which one would you like me to read, I ask, reaching for the pile. No mama, she says. These are all princesses. You won't like them or read them to me.

Aha. At age 4, she'd internalized my deep ambivalence, my dislike for Disney princesses. Although she couldn't yet express it in words, she was already modifying her behavior based on her perceptions of my preferences, knowing I only accept princesses like "The Paperbag Princess" or "Cinder Edna" or the ones from Ethel Johnston Phelps's international collection "Tatterhood and Other Tales" (get a copy for all the kids you know!) and that I won't buy her a Frozen costume, even though just about every kid in her universe has one—boys and girls. She had internalized that I deem only feminist princesses acceptable, and that the other kinds are not welcome in our home. She has been learning from me that the things she loves are not okay for her to love.

Crap. That's not how you raise an empowered daughter.

I'm a big believer in the importance of play and pretend, finding it reassuring somehow that so many studies find they build children's creativity and confidence, particularly important when far too many girls have a confidence deficit that holds them back in life. I hate the concept of helicopter parenting. To my mind, bruised knees are badges of courage.

Yet here I was, helicopter feministing.

Worshiping at the foot of the altar. From the Facebook page of Jordana Horn Gordon.

*I tell my 4.5-year-old daughter that queens have **power**, and I ask her—when she's being a queen—"How will you **use** your power?"*

Sheesh. This was a huge mama moment for me. My job is to help her learn to navigate the world she lives in. Not to pretend it doesn't exist or to shelter her from it. And I certainly never want her to feel she has to keep a part of her identity secret from me.

Oy.

As it turns out, my princess moat isn't about choosing a side and standing firm. It's about how to cross it. (Can't go over it; can't go under it; we'll have to go through it.) So now I buy the occasional old-school princess toy or book. And when I read these stories to her, we talk about them when we're done. Sometimes during. ("Mama, just read.")

It's true that I still try to steer her pretend play toward queens over princesses. After all, I grew up in the 1980s, and the last

thing I want to do is revisit my own angst around the Jewish American Princess stereotype, past and present. We talk about real queens and princesses (my daughter is half Jewish New Yorker, half English, so there's the Queen of England); plus, new practices of royal succession (less sexist!), and of course, how royals are different from presidents.

I tell her that queens have power, and I ask her—when she's being a queen—how she'll use hers.

All this thinking about princesses and queens leads me back to Esther, the ultimate story about pretending. Outside of Purim, in our particular cultural moment, Esther is nowhere near as ubiquitous as Elsa of "Frozen" fame, who reigns her own Disney Empire, and singlehandedly took down the myth that girl leads don't sell. While my daughter delights in the G-rated version of Esther, the lessons of Elsa are much easier to distil and discuss with a young child: In "Frozen," a girl has powers she struggles with, eventually embraces what scares her most, and emerges as an extremely powerful young woman. And while the whole Disney marriage thing plays its pronounced role, at least this princess is not in a harem.

A couple months after the bookstore incident, we are sleeping over at the house of friends in upstate New York. Excited about inner tubing the next morning, she can't sleep. I don't want to disturb anyone to go downstairs to fetch her own books and toys, so I dive into my own bag and pull out a book: Jill Lepore's *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*. After all, it has pictures. She loves it. So much so that, weeks later, we're still having a conversation about how I'm sharing it with her but it's still mine. For now. Perhaps, though, when she's just a little bit older, we'll learn all about WW's mysterious beginnings and delve deeper into why I prefer superheroes and action figures to princess dolls. And of them all, I like Wonder Woman best.

And somehow, buying pink dresses and mermaid sticker books seems less fraught now, in part because my husband is wearing a tiara while he makes breakfast and packs our girl's lunch. And in part because my daughter pronounced, this very morning, about our living room: This is a Queendom, not a Kingdom. That's all her. And this fall, thanks to Elsa and Esther and Wonder Woman, we'll surely be talking more about hidden strengths, the difference between royals and presidents, titles and responsibilities—especially when I take her with me to vote. ■

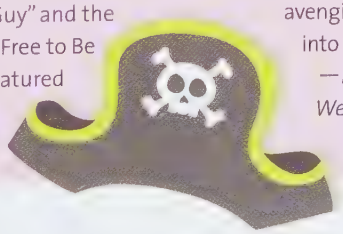
Erica Brody is a writer, editor and strategist committed to progressive causes. She works in the places where culture and change intersect, most recently as executive director and editor in chief of Zeek Magazine.

An early reader—Lilith's art director—is distressed by the fact that there is more policing of girl toys than boy toys.

Why the princess problem affects boys, too

It's great to see alternative scripts, like the one here, for dealing with the retrograde swarm of pink accoutrements for little girls. I also wonder about the effect this princess pushback has on little boys. I'm a mother of sons (ages two and seven), and I hate how gendered everything has become in their world. But while gender-norm alarm bells go off for feminist parents when a little girl is occupied with her pretend kitchen, few parents rail about how tough or "masculine" a toy is. When a boy (like my older son) runs around saying "Ahoy, Matey," and tells me to walk the plank, this gets a laugh. Why are pirates good role models, but princesses bad? Why is a girl in blue (or in a Superman cape) better than a girl in pink? I see this difference despite the fact that in my progressive Brooklyn neighborhood a little boy can wear a pink shirt or have long hair and no one says boo, as it should be. But the role models kids are exposed to in books, videos and playthings—and our reactions as parents—are stuck in a version of the gender binary which is still not very highly evolved.

A girl interested in classically non-girl fields like math and science is lauded, as she should be. And a tomboy is cool. But a feminine boy? Still not so cool in our culture, despite the 25 years that have passed since Christine Lavin sang "Sensitive New Age Guy" and the 43 years since "Free to Be You and Me" featured football hero Roosevelt (Rosey) Grier singing "It's All Right to Cry."



Something has turned back—and not for the better. An author who writes young adult and children's books with princess content (albeit featuring *strong* princesses) recently described readings at which young boys booed her for her content. Are boys getting the old message that for all kids—boys and girls—it's better to be "boyish" than "girlish"? As a mother of sons whom I want to raise to respect women, I worry that scorning the things so many girls like, while we're merely amused at the prototypical pirates and avenging robots of boys' toys, translates into a message of subtle misogyny.

—Lindsay Barnett, as told to Susan Weidman Schneider

REVIEWS

After Brain Surgery, Food is a Link to Memory

The memoir *Stir*, by **Jessica Fechtor** (Avery, $25.95), celebrates living life to the fullest. Fechtor tells of how, as a married graduate student in her late twenties, she went for a run one morning and an aneurism burst in her brain. This book charts the course of her recovery, interspersed with recipes from the meals she cooked, ate, and blogged about during her gradual process of healing and reclaiming herself once again.

Memoirs based on food blogs are an increasingly popular genre, but Fechtor's book stands out for the many meanings she came to ascribe to food and eating: As someone who loved to cook for others, food was a way of nurturing; but as one who found herself dizzy, nauseous, and unable to get up from bed, let alone walk to the stove, food became a way of learning to accept the nurturing care of others, which often involved being a guest in her own home—eating other people's food off her own plates, and enjoying potluck Shabbat meals with friends. When she lost her sense of smell following one of several brain surgeries, food became a link to memory—to her grandmother Louise's apple pie, to the mayonnaise-less potato salad her stepmother prepared when she was a child, to her mother-in-law's cholent with kugel. As Fechtor began to heal, food enabled her to affirm her faith in the future: "When you're cooking, you're alive. You've got no choice. To fry an egg is to operate with the perfect faith that you will sit down and eat it." And in the book's final scene, when Fechtor became so healthy and whole that she could, as she put it, make a baby under her shirt, food meant the ability to sustain and nurture new life as well.

And yet *Stir* is remarkable not just for all that food is, but also for all that it is not. Fechtor never mentions carbs or fat or calories, and her recipes contain kale and pomegranates but also butter, sugar, and heavy whipping cream. For Fechtor, healthy eating has nothing to do with restricting what she eats or substituting ingredients—healthy eating is anything that nourishes her and the people she cares for, and is prepared and served in love and fellowship. Her comparison of cooking and baking is particularly apt: "You can cook for one. A fried egg and toast, a potato with cottage cheese, a single artichoke, steamed....Baking, on the other hand....You bake to share. Baking means you have more than enough: more flour, more butter, more eggs, to make more cake than you need for just you." She regards food preparation as an act of generosity and expansiveness—it is about sharing, caring, breaking bread together. She delights in regaining her appetite, in being strong enough to pick up running again, in sitting in a Berlin café with her husband on a weekend morning and ordering "a multitiered platter of fruit, cheese, sugared crepes, fresh rolls, and smoked fish," which they'd luxuriate over for two hours.

"When you're cooking, you're alive. You've got no choice. To fry an egg is to operate with the perfect faith that you will sit down and eat it."

Fechtor's lack of preoccupation with body image is striking in light of her predicament: brain surgery left her with a dent in her head the size of a golf ball. Forced to wear a protective helmet over her skull wherever she goes, for a long time she remains unconvinced about whether she wants to have reconstructive surgery at all; she is just so grateful to be alive. With her optic nerve compressed, she loses all depth perception, and yet paradoxically she has a remarkable ability to put it all in perspective. There is much to savor in her recipes, but even more so in her reflections. In our image-obsessed society, Fechtor's embrace of life and health is stirring and inspiring.

ILANA KURSHAN *works in book publishing in Jerusalem.*

Kishinev to Stonewall, and Beyond

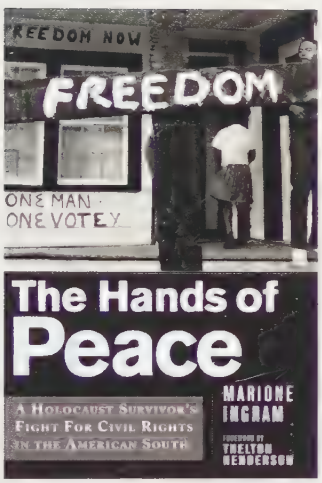
This first novel from longtime progressive activist **Shelley Ettinger** is a multigenerational saga that begins in Kishinev, circa 1903, during a massive Easter Monday pogrom that leaves one member of the Resnikoff family dead and the rest shaken and horrified. That's the gripping opening to *Vera's Will* (Hamilton Stone Editions, $16.95), vividly detailing the anti-Semitism then endemic throughout the region. What's more, the post-riot divisions within the Resnikoff family—whether to leave the Pale of Settlement for the presumed safety of America or stay in Russia and work for revolution—are beautifully presented.

Most of the book takes place in the U.S. after the relocation, and follows school-aged Vitka—renamed Vera by Ellis Island officials—as she and her parents and siblings struggle to assimilate. The narrative subsequently sweeps through the 20th century and weaves the personal and political coming-of-age of Randy Steiner, Vera's granddaughter, into the slow unfolding of her grandmother's life story.

Sexuality, and the fact that both Randy and Vera are lesbians, looms large, and distinguishes *Vera's Will* from other novels—or even memoirs—about the challenges of displacement. Ettinger skillfully depicts the hardships that women and

men "in the life" had to endure before the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion opened the door to a more liberatory politic.

This, of course, came too late for Vera, who ended up marrying a man she didn't love, bearing two children, and then losing custody of them once she was outed. Her attempt to win her children and grandchildren's affection in the aftermath of being cast aside forms the crux of the tale, and it is poignant, maddening and evocative. One particularly jarring scene involves Vera's abrasive husband's ultimatum: He will pay her rent and other bills, but in exchange he will allow her only a few hours each month with her offspring. It's a take-it-or-leave-it deal, and readers are made to understand the limited choices lesbians had in this restrictive era. Indeed, Vera's life is a tragedy writ large, but Ettinger nonetheless gives us a


FREEDOM NOW
FREEDOM
ONE MAN ONE VOTE
The Hands of Peace
A Holocaust Survivor's Fight For Civil Rights in the American South
MARIONE INGRAM
FOREWORD BY THELTON HENDERSON

BOOK EXCERPT

A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR WHO FIGHTS FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Marione Ingram, a German-born Jew who survived the Holocaust and wrote about her wartime and postwar experiences in an earlier memoir, has now published her second, ***The Hands of Peace: A Holocaust Survivor's Fight for Civil Rights in the American South*** (Skyhorse Publishing, $24.99). This is a struggle which she says called out to her personally as a Jew who had experienced murderous Nazi prejudice and racism first-hand. Although the large-scale events she chronicles here are familiar—the momentous 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the murders of civil rights workers Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner, the role of northern activists through 1964's Freedom Summer and after—it's the accretion of detail on a small, personal scale that brings a reader into the moment, the dropping of famous names aside (James Baldwin, Fannie Lou Hamer, and many more).

Ingram, now 79, faced discrimination herself when she and a college-educated black friend (who could get work in a publishing house only as a bathroom attendant) try to rent an apartment together in Greenwich Village in the 1950s and faced the ubiquitous threat of violence when she went south to teach In a Freedom School.

The granularity of her descriptions, which often in memoir can make a reader feel excluded or put off, here succeeds in making the not-so-distant past very immediate. Even in comfortable Maryland suburbs, violent racism lurked close to the surface. In one vivid example, Ingram details what happened when she and her husband, in 1965, encouraged black friends to join them in their suburban community, just outside the nation's capital:

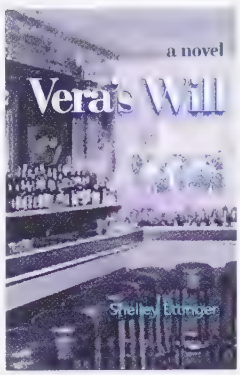
For the next several weeks we were subjected to many remarkably inventive efforts to frighten and harass us into fleeing. Some of the events were so surprising and appalling that we were amazed that they were happening in an affluent community chock-full of high government officials, office-holders, professionals, and senior managers of every type of benevolent or public interest organization. Even our babysitters were threatened with harm for taking care of our son. Twice we returned home to find police and a terrified sitter. One Sunday morning, while we were walking with Sondra Dodson, a beautiful African American friend who had come to tell us she had decided to marry Bill Raspberry, the Washington Post's lone black reporter, a police car came racing toward us, screeching to a stop inches away, then sitting there racing its engine until we walked away. We learned, because a friendly neighbor told us, that our tormentors had formed a syndicate to buy our rented house.

Fortunately I was at home and able to fend off a posse from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which had come to impound Orfeo, our thoroughly pampered standard poodle, in response to reports that we were cruelly abusing him. One of the most upsetting events occurred each day when the Good Humor truck arrived and neighborhood mothers would rush out of their homes and make a big show of buying treats for all the kids, conspicuously excepting Danny. Still we held our ground until an anonymous caller said that it was clear to them (whoever they were) that we were not sufficiently moved by what they had done so far and therefore they had decided to "go after" our son. Soon after the call, a car drove across our lawn toward Danny. I reached him first, snatched him up, and left that home within an hour, never to return.

I suppose that I shouldn't have been surprised to learn that affluent northern suburbanites could be as vicious as southern Klansmen. We later found out what we should have guessed: the people who chased us back into the District of Columbia had infiltrated the Fair Housing Association to prevent it from helping African Americans move into their neighborhoods. Viewing us as "block-busters" who would bring down home values, the infiltrators were prepared to do whatever it took to protect their golden eggs.

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

character full of vim, a survivor who crafts a fulfilling, if limited, life. Vera finds work as a bookkeeper, makes platonic friends, and does what she can for herself and others. In palpable fear that her "secret" will be discovered by her boss, landlord, and co-workers, Vera decides to live modestly, avoiding unnecessary risks.



In contrast, granddaughter Randy attends her hometown's annual gay pride parade and becomes an outspoken organizer against heterosexism and homophobia. The juxtaposition is stark.

Vera's Will celebrates the evolving social mores that have led to the recent mainstreaming of LGBTQ issues. At the same time, Randy argues that this is not enough. To her credit, Ettinger makes Randy multi-dimensional, and she never sounds preachy or didactic as she links classism, racism and sexism to LGBTQ rights. A foil for her beloved grandmother, she remains a dynamic symbol of progress.

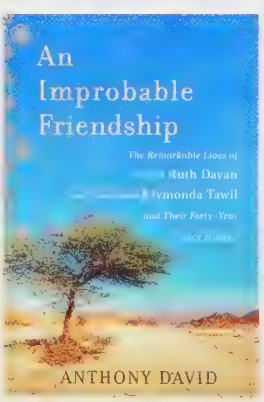
Grandmother and granddaughter, activists in ways that reflect their eras.

Vera's Will not only tells a searing story, but also a thoughtful and inspiring one. Indeed, it's a book whose characters will pop into your head, tug at your psyche, and demand that you choose sides. Unlike Randy, Vera was no activist, but her deepest desire was to live authentically. Her inability to do so is a grim reminder of a time that should be firmly relegated to history.

ELEANOR J. BADER *is a Brooklyn-based teacher and award-winning journalist who writes for Truthout.org, RHRealityCheck.org, Theasy.com and other progressive, feminist blogs and print publications.*

Truth Is Even Stranger than Cold-War Fiction

Meet Millie Stein, a New York City housewife, circa 1947. Millie's saddled with a remote, Russian-born husband,



BEING FRIENDS WITH THE ENEMY

The friendship between Israeli **Ruth Dayan** and Palestinian **Raymonda Tawil**—deep, decades-long, not-afraid-to-be-contentious—defied national taboos.

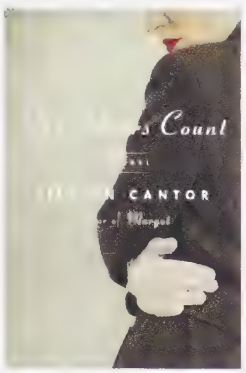
They are powerful in their own right, despite being related by marriage to men whose fame eclipsed their own: Ruth Dayan was the wife (and then ex-wife) of the late, iconic Israeli General Moshe Dayan and Raymonda Tawil was mother-in-law to the PLO's late chairman Yassir Arafat. Each of these women is a passionate and indefatigable advocate for her own people—and also for recognizing others' humanity. Still going strong at 98 and 75, respectively, the two friends invited historian **Anthony David**, author of several scholarly books about Jewish history in Europe and about the Middle East, to write their dual biography: ***An Improbable Friendship: The Remarkable Lives of Ruth Dayan and Raymonda Tawil and Their 40-Year Peace Mission*** (Arcade, $24.99).

Tawil's earliest memories are of the family mansion in Acre. Her father was part of the wealthy, aristocratic Palestinian-Christian Hawa family; her mother, born in Kfar Yassif, was raised in New York and known as a feisty feminist. Tawil attended a Catholic boarding school in the Galilee along with Jewish students. Her family left and lost their home in 1948, and Tawil, eventually moving to Jordan to reconnect with her brothers, married there, later living in Nablus on the West Bank. She now lives in Malta. Dayan's parents, born in Israel, were classmates at the elite Herzliya Gymnasia, alma mater to many in the pre-and early-state Zionist leadership. Dayan spent some childhood years in England, where her parents studied at the London School of Economics. After her marriage to Moshe, she moved with him to the farming village of Nahalal.

Rich in anecdote and juicy detail, this book demonstrates Dayan's and Tawil's creativity, conviction and courage, offering personal glimpses into major historical events. Included

a son who may or may not be autistic and a mother who favors Millie's perfect, suburb-dwelling older sister. The only ones on Millie's side are her beloved Bubbe Kasha and her new friend, Ethel Rosenberg. In ***The Hours Count***, by **Jillian Cantor** (Riverhead, $26.95), Millie and her family are fictional creations, but Ethel and her husband, known here as Julie, are anything but. Cantor does a convincing job of weaving together the fictional and the historical, and artfully shuttles back and forth between the night Ethel and Julius are put to death in the electric chair and the events that lead up to their execution.

The two women meet in front of their apartment building in Knickerbocker Village, on Manhattan's Lower East Side. From the start, Millie admires Ethel, and sees her new friend as worldly and sophisticated. They also bond over their children. At three, Millie's son David has yet to utter a word. Ethel's slightly older son is prone to shocking fits of temper. With Ethel, Millie can confide her feelings of shame and inadequacy around her son's challenges; in turn, Ethel tells Millie about psychoanalysis, a process she undergoes in the course of the novel.



At first, Millie makes casual mention of newsworthy topics like the ever-present fear of Stalin and the atom bomb, and she's aware that Ethel and her husband have vaguely Communist leanings. But with too much else to worry about, she doesn't care very much about these larger preoccupations. David grows older, and remains mute; her husband, already distant, ignores his son and is fixated on having another child, one who is "normal." When Millie learns that the FBI is investigating Helen Keller, she is unmoved:

I stood to fix everyone lunch and put Helen Keller and the FBI out of my head. That was still the way it was then. The FBI seemed like nothing that could hurt us, like something so very faraway in the remote District of Columbia. I felt no fear or disdain for them at all then. I literally felt nothing. They were nothing to me.

Gradually, though, political realities intrude on Millie's private life. Ethel and Julie are now in the FBI's cross-

are occasions where personal connections yielded exceptions to onerous decrees—such as getting a curfew lifted—as well as many incidents where violence unfortunately was not averted. From her early years, Tawil saw, strategically, that the Palestinians needed to consider the Israeli Jewish left their natural allies, and she was in regular contact with such public figures as Uri Avnery, Amos Kenan and Abie Nathan, even as she opened the first PLO press offices. Dayan worked with Israeli immigrant women, then defied constraints to work with Palestinian women as well to develop and market their traditional handicrafts through her renowned crafts organization and fashion house, Maskit.

As Dayan and Tawil's story comes to a close in this book, a reader can lament that the wall built to stop the infiltration of terrorists into Israel has separated two peoples whose lives could and should have many more positive connections.

While this authorized dual biography narrates the women's relationship with what reads as candor, Lilith was curious to know more. We asked Ruth Dayan and Raymonda Tawil if either had experienced any backlash against their friendship—or if they thought perhaps their relationship was easily overlooked, or seen as non-threatening to the status quo, because they are women. Here is what they individually replied:

RUTH DAYAN: *"Look, for my work with Maskit I was going back and forth across into the West Bank all the time. It was a normal part of my life. In those days there was a lot more mingling than today. There wasn't a wall, and Moshe took away the old border. Did I ever experience backlash? I don't remember ever hearing any criticism for my friendship with Raymonda, and of course no one threatened me. Anyone who knew Raymonda's reputation also knew it wasn't just a harmless friendship between two women. I don't think we ever sat down and just talked about our children or whatever. Raymonda always needed something: to get someone out of jail, to help someone else leave the country, or get a permit for one thing or the other."*

RAYMONDA TAWIL: *"You must realize that we were under military occupation, and there was a lot of violence in the air. There wasn't a Palestinian family without someone in jail or in exile. Many Palestinians thought that just talking to Israelis was treason. So, yes, I had to be very cautious with my friendship with Ruth. She was the ex-wife of General Dayan, after all. My God, you can't imagine what this meant. People were being killed for a lot less. If anything, being a woman made it even more dangerous. Not only was I breaking one taboo by acting on my own as a woman, but I was doing so with Israelis."*

NAOMI DANIS

hairs, and Millie is afraid for them—and for herself.

As the novel draws to its horrific conclusion, one that is no less powerful for being foreordained, we are left with a chilling sense of how the political can all too easily morph into the personal, and how no one is ever really safe. A recent op-ed piece in the New York Times by Michael and Robert Meeropol, the Rosenberg sons, reminds us that though the Rosenbergs themselves are gone, the monumental injustice against them lives on. Cantor's description of the actual execution, drawn from the eyewitness accounts, is as harrowing today as it must have been in 1953. Read it and weep.

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH *is Lilith's fiction editor. Her seventh novel,* The House on Primrose Pond, *is due out in February 2016.*

A Child's Perspective on Chile's Disappeared

I Lived on Butterfly Hill, by **Marjorie Agosin**, opens in the idyllic coastal town of Valparaiso, Chile, in the early 1970s. This middle-grade historical novel, translated from the Spanish by E.M. O'Connor with illustrations by Lee White (Atheneum, $17.99), is based loosely on the 1973 coup by General Augusto Pinochet, who ousted socialist president Salvador Allende and ruled Chile as a military dictator for 17 years.

Agosin—known for her many adult books set in Chile—does not mention these historical figures by name, and here the rule of terror lasts only a couple of years.

The narrator of this beautiful, long (450-page) book is 11-year-old Celeste Marconi, whose voice, in the beginning, is full of optimism and wonder, her life replete with beloved school chums, a little harmless folk magic, favorite foods and family rituals. Her mother and father, both physicians, devote themselves to helping poor families. Slowly cloud storms gather, beginning with the increasing presence of warships in the harbor, and Celeste has a growing sense that something is wrong. At first none of the grownups will confirm her worries, but as all kinds of new rules are imposed, people she knows—including some of her classmates—disappear. Threats are made, and soon her activist parents must go into hiding, leaving her in the care of her grandmother, Abuela Frida, who escaped the Holocaust and knows about hard times, and their housekeeper, Nana Delfina, who helped raise Celeste's mother. The older women come to realize that for her own safety they must send Celeste away, too.

Threats are made, and soon her activist parents must go into hiding.

Sent to live with her aunt in Maine, Celeste is suddenly a misunderstood and unwelcome stranger, who slowly makes friends with other marginalized immigrant children, and is encouraged by the attention of a few kind teachers while all the while missing home.

This unusual book explores political terror and fear from the point of view of a preadolescent girl who's able to develop the resilience required

MORE: *author interviews and book news at Lilith.org/blog.*

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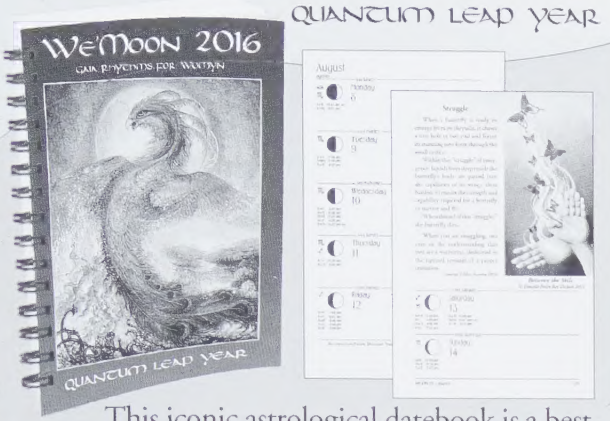

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of a survivor. An important lesson here for young readers accustomed, perhaps, to books about slavery or about the Holocaust, is that very bad things can happen all over the world, and that some of one's own classmates may have endured experiences unlike those of most children their age. Though things are never quite the same, Celeste and her family are eventually reunited, and along with her survivor grandmother, who had collected and hid forbidden books during the years of the dictatorship, Celeste helps establish a library to encourage literacy.

Agosin, who teaches Spanish at Wellesley, is a human rights activist in addition to being a prolific author; she left Chile for the United States with her parents as an adolescent in the 1970s.

NAOMI DANIS

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Memory Objects

Author and artist Melanie Braverman founded the Alzheimer's Family Support Center of Cape Cod to provide free supportive services for families and individuals living with Alzheimer's disease/dementia. Books are objects that form—and inform—memory. Recalling how the mother-in-law she cared for was attached to particular books even after she could no longer read, Braverman commissioned and curated a collection of one-of-a-kind books by authors and artists, auctioned off to benefit this nonprofit organization. More about ongoing community services and efforts at *alzheimerscapecod.com*.

Nursing at Shul

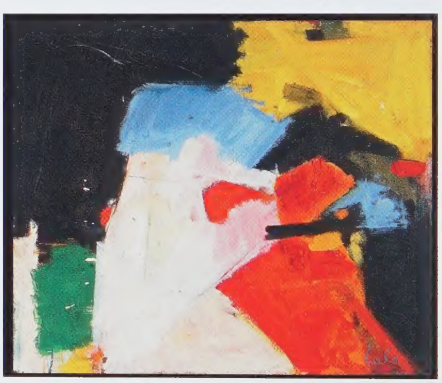
Have you ever nursed in the sanctuary? Where else could you go for a more private, dedicated space? And how child-friendly is your congregation anyway? After visiting a number of synagogues with her baby daughter, Rabbi Maya Resnikoff realized it was hard to know how to handle breastfeeding in any shul the first time you go. If you are breastfeeding or have breastfed, help clue others in by filling out a questionnaire about synagogue experiences. A blog shares the information and includes reviews as well as rabbis' responses and source texts on the subject of breastfeeding. *nursingatshul.wordpress.com*

Artificial Stones

How far can nature be imitated? Goldsmith Vered Kaminski, a graduate of the Department of Jewelry and Fashion at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem, has been working for the past three decades at the intersection of local material environments and processes of construction and deconstruction. She won the 2015 Andy Prize for Contemporary Crafts, and her work is held in collections including the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, and the Jewish Museum in New York. "Vered Kaminski: Artificial Stones," is up through November 28, 2015 at the Tel Aviv Museum. *tamuseum.org.il/about-the-exhibition/vered-kaminski-artificial-stones*

Fair Care at Home

Is your home someone's workplace? If yes, you're likely negotiating your role as a domestic employer, and you lack clear guidelines for fair wages and other workplace issues. "We believe that care jobs will be the jobs of the future. It's in all of our interest to ensure that the quality of these jobs reflects the value and importance of the work. Fairness and quality care go hand-in-hand," said Ai-jen Poo, Director of National Domestic Workers Alliance. In a joint campaign with Care.com, the largest online marketplace for people looking for support and services in their homes, NDWA asks that employers commit to three practices: fair pay, clear expectations and paid time off. They provide a framework for figuring out the basics, from calculating wages and paid overtime, to transparency and paid sick days and holidays. *care.com/faircarepledge*



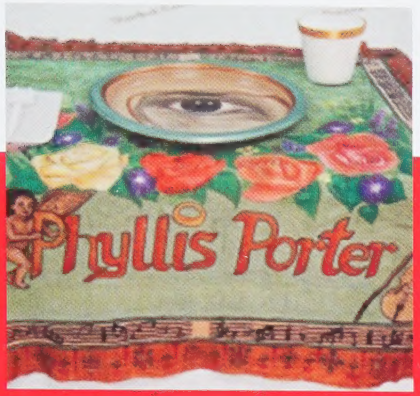
A Painter Who Begins at the End

A forerunner of Abstract Expressionism in Israel, Hagit Lalo (*née* Shtriet), traveled in the early 1950s to California, studied art and was awarded a scholarship at the Hans Hoffman School of Fine Art. In 1959 she returned to Israel, where she had two solo exhibitions and participated in several group shows. She died in 1961, 29 years old. A first comprehensive exhibition of her work, closing October 5, 2015, is at the Tel Aviv Museum. *tamuseum.org.il*

Have You Had the Conversation?

In 2010, columnist Ellen Goodman and a group of media, clergy, and medical

TOP LEFT PAINTING: MARION ROTH. RIGHT: HAGIT LALO, COURTESY TEL AVIV MUSEUM.



"Shared Dining": Imprisoned Women Make Art

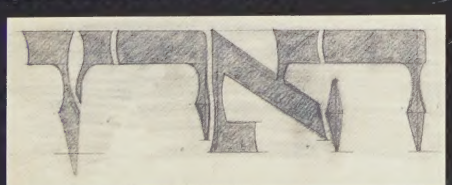
Two years ago, 10 women incarcerated at Connecticut's York Correctional Institution, calling themselves "the Women of York," created art inspired by Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party." Using materials repurposed from their everyday lives—such as plastic cutlery and Styrofoam cups—their installation is comprised of 10 place settings, each dedicated to a woman of personal significance to the artist. The work raises questions about politics, gender and incarceration, and reflects on the power of Judy Chicago's iconic masterwork. Through September 13 at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, at the Brooklyn Museum where "The Dinner Party" is on permanent exhibition. *brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/women_of_york_shared_dining*

professionals gathered to share stories of how people within their own circles had had "good deaths" or "bad deaths." From this The Conversation Project began, in an attempt to change American culture by encouraging people to become experts on their own and their loved ones' wishes for end-of-life care. They've also created a starter kit to help parents of seriously ill children who want guidance about having the "conversation" with their children. November 6-15, 2015 has been designated "Conversation Sabbath," in which clergy of many different faiths will teach about having conversations about one another's values and wishes on this often elided subject. *theconversationproject.org*

Franziska Baruch

Franziska Baruch designed the first emergency currency for the State of Israel and the first Israeli passport in 1948. A pioneer of Hebrew graphic design and Israeli typography, her work is explored in one of the Israel Museum's 50th anniversary exhibitions. Baruch migrated to Palestine after training in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, and with others addressed the need to create a new printed language in modern Hebrew—perhaps the most urgent design need in Israel's first years. "New Types: Three Pioneers of Hebrew Graphic Design," opens October 20 at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. *imj.org*

Clockwise from left: Sketch for emblem of Jerusalem, 1949; sketch for Ha'aretz newspaper logotype, 1937; layout for the passport of the State of Israel, 1948.



How Much Are You Worth?

Women still earn 77 cents to every dollar earned by men, and far too many single moms are not granted sick days to care for themselves or their children. "Women's economic literacy and longterm financial security are pillars of our work," says Jewish Women International CEO Lori Weinstein. JWI has developed age-specific curricula for mothers and teen daughters as well as college-age women and young professionals. "Know Your Worth," created in partnership with Hadassah, helps women approaching retirement gain economic security. Workshops include advocacy training for issues that affect all women, such as student loan repayment and strengthening social security. *www.jwi.org/fli*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

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FRANZISKA BARUCH IMAGES: COURTESY ISRAEL MUSEUM, JERUSALEM, BY ELIE POSNER.

AT THE THRIFT SHOP

by NANCY KALIKOW MAXWELL

MOST PEOPLE CAN'T BEAR TO GO TO THE ANIMAL POUND because of the urge to adopt all the abandoned animals they see. For me, the location that pulls at my heartstrings is the Goodwill Store in Plantation, FL. I can't stand to leave all those forlorn-looking menorahs and kiddush cups in the store. Like forsaken puppies, they cry out for me to give them a good home.

Because of the large population of elderly Jews here in South Florida, as people downsize or die their household treasures end up as inventory at local thrift shops. I love to shop at these second-hand stores, but am tempted to buy (read: rescue) every Jewish-related item I see. Only the fancy *tzedakah* (charity) boxes hold no appeal for me, because I'm philosophically opposed to buying an item to announce one's generosity. If you have extra money, give it to a charity instead of purchasing an expensive container. The cocoa tin my daughter decorated in Hebrew school 20 years ago serves this purpose for me still.

But I cannot turn away from all the other Jewish paraphernalia. That word originally referred to items a bride owned beyond her dowry, exactly the type of objects I find on the shelves: Shabbos candlesticks, challah covers, seder plates, menorahs; most likely all wedding gifts, originally wrapped with good wishes for the happy couple.

I enjoy imagining the family stories that unfolded around these pieces over time. I can picture Blanche, illuminated by the Sabbath candles, announcing her engagement to Izzy, followed by silence. No one could stand the schnook. And there was that Passover when Uncle Harry forgot where he hid the afikomen; matzo wrapped in its embroidered cover turned up two weeks later in the freezer. Or there was the time the Hanukkah latkes turned blue, their color matching the hand-painted dreidels on the ceramic platter. They were delicious, but you had to keep your eyes closed when you ate them. You get the idea; each object is a vehicle for invention.

And now all these conveyers of memories sit abandoned on the thrift shop shelf, nestled among a 2005 varsity volleyball trophy, a Christmas angel plate, a set of coffee mugs from Starlight Diner ($2.50 for four).

I'm not the only one driven to rescue Jewish junk. When a friend found a needlepoint wall-hanging embroidered with "*Shalom*" in Hebrew at a community rummage sale, she was compelled to buy it. Digging out money from her purse, she heard the seller say "Oh, thank goodness someone's taking this. I made it for my Jewish husband. He just left me. I want this—and him—out of my sight."

The propensity to rescue previously owned Jewish possessions must run in my family. When my brother was scrounging through a table of tchotchkes at a yard sale, he discovered a velvet tallis bag in the bottom of a Sketchers shoe box. Finding a neatly folded prayer shawl inside its holder, he grabbed it and approached the bored-looking woman sitting in a lawn chair, downing her beer.

"You can't sell this," he commanded, thrusting the tallis at her. "This was probably given to somebody for his bar mitzvah. That's when I got mine."

Granted, he has rarely used his in the 50 years since. Even so, he cringed at the possibility that the ritual garment could end up as a campy accoutrement for some teenager or as a little girl's dress-up costume.

"Honestly," he pleaded, "this needs to stay in your family."

She looked at him and asked flatly, "Ya wanna buy it?"

All these religious accoutrements waiting for him—or more likely his heirs—to pass on, like a Jewish fruitcake.

And so he did. He purchased the tallis, took it home, and tossed it into his dresser drawer. There it sits, atop his other unused tallis, right next to a crocheted yarmulke with the price tag still on. All these religious accoutrements waiting for him—or more likely his heirs—to pass on, like a Jewish fruitcake.

Perhaps there is a better way to recycle these keepsakes. How about sending them to an online auction? Not only would this help find loving homes for these pre-owned objects, it would raise money without any fancy *pushke* (charity) boxes.

I love this idea, and thought about it for my latest Goodwill purchase. Though I already owned three, I've just bought another menorah. With my senior discount, it cost me $1.79. To benefit a charity, I'm now auctioning this fine brass *hanukkiah*. It's a chance for someone else to own a piece of vintage Judaica.

For those with a vivid imagination, it comes loaded with plenty of stories, along with a lifetime guarantee. At the end of the owner's life—which God willing will be a long time from now—it can be put up for auction once again. Or, if need be, taken to Goodwill by your descendants, along with all your other Jewish junk.

Nancy Kalikow Maxwell is a freelance writer whose previous articles in Lilith include "Shabbat Without Shopping Carts." Her website is www.librarygrants.org; her email is kaliwell@kaliwellinc.com.